The Power of Tautology

The Roots of Literary Theory

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Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more nor less." -Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland "The method of 'postulating' what we want has many advantages; they are the same as the advantages of theft over honest toil." -Bertrand Russell, The Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy

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Acknowledgments

These reflections on literary theory were born of a series of encounters and occasions over some twenty years' time, and the following remarks can hardly suffice to suggest the number of those who have helped me in thinking through the ideas I offer the reader here. First of all I must thank the members of a series of graduate seminars, given at the University of Missouri-Columbia, in which graduate students in French and Spanish, and a few other disciplines, helped me hash out ideas about literary theory over the past decade or so. The Research Council at the same university must be thanked for periods of research leave during which I was able, while working on other projects, to pursue my interest in theory. And I offer thanks to colleagues in the Department of Romance Languages at UMC for listening to these ideas and commenting on them on various occasions and in various forms.

Literary Theory and Tautological Thinking

"You seem very clever at explaining words, Sir," said Alice. "Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called 'Jabberwocky' ?" "Let's hear it," said Humpty Dumpty. "I can explain all the poems that ever were invented-and a good many that haven't been invented just yet." Yes, I am offering another book on literary theory, but one with a difference, to use a term of dubious value. There are no hagiographies here, no dithyrambic praise of theories that have become the source of the cliches that have come, in a remarkably short time, to dominate literary studies today. Given the crisis that besets literary studies, it seems timely to question the value of these theories, and so I propose to discuss and critique the dominant theories current in literary studies today. In doing this critique, I want to lay bare the tautological axioms that underlie these theories. By laying bare these axioms I hope to show what makes literary theory

plausible in some sense; for, like Humpty Dumpty, theorists often use words to mean what they want them to mean.

For the same reason, their theories often have scant justification to claim to be knowledge. (And I assume that all theorists propose to offer some form of knowledge.) In making this demonstration, I address myself to readers for whom rationality, in a broad sense, sets the standards for knowledge. This audience does not accept without reservation the belief that we live in two cultures-Dne literary, the other scientific-nor the belief that standards of truth for one culture are necessarily invalid for the other. It is true that we live in a world with many models for knowledge.

But the criteria for the truth of these models is much the same, whatever be the specific nature of the model. For purposes of argument and demonstration, scientific models for validation can often show what criteria are necessary for the rigorous validation of theoretical models 13 purporting to offer knowledge, be it about literature or any other area of inquiry. In fine, I want to address myself to the question as to why literary theorists defend theories that often seem quite implausible both from the point of view of common sense and from the point of view of scientific methodology.

I do not intend to develop here a model for literary theory. Rather, I shall explore how the belief in the power of tautology to offer truth engenders those curious worldviews known as literary theory. Or, in other terms, we shall explore the workings of the Humpty Dumpty principle: the belief that defining terms as one wants offers knowledge. I take this belief in the certainties of tautologies to be in one sense the opposite of scientific thinking, which is founded in a respect for skepticism and a recognition that no model is ever certain. Literary theory by and large offers no criteria

for verifying its models and relies upon the persuasiveness of definitions to build its models, which then have all the certainty of untested verbal constructs.

I do not reject out of hand literary theory or those postmodern critical discourses that are dependent on literary theory. The one truth of theory I certainly accept is that we always want theories. In examining the tautologies that ground contemporary theory I want to offer a distanced, though not entirely hostile critique of the dominant theoretical modes of literary study. These theories have had great impact on university departments of literature-perhaps I should say graduate-level departments, because with few exceptions it seems that literary theory and postmodern modes of thinking have had as yet relatively little direct impact on the initiation of undergraduates into literary studies. I am not sure if this reflects the decline of literary studies in high schools-undergraduates are clearly not ready for the philosophical thinking demanded by theory-or if it is simply in the nature of postmodern theories of literature that they are inaccessible to those who, like Plato's students in dialectic, have not undergone years of initiation. In this regard, literary study today differs from the scientific disciplines in that literature relies upon a pedagogical practice in which initiates into literature usually study, in a rather eclectic fashion, a scattering of thematically and historically organized courses before, as graduate students, they encounter the theories that many of their teachers now hold to be the only adequate way of explaining the nature of literary texts. It is a bit as if, in biology, undergraduate students did not hear of evolution before they entered graduate school.

Literary studies have had a natural affinity with historical and philosophical inquiry, and most of the questions of literary theory are also faced by scholars in philosophy and

history. However, most contempoIntroduction 15 rary philosophers and historians have shown little interest in literary theory, when they have not rejected much of it with alarmed denunciation.

(Psychoanalytical history and deconstructive legal studies are interesting exceptions.) It is unfortunate that there has not been a greater dialogue, for the empirical tradition in history and the analytical tradition in philosophy might profit from literary theory's speculation-and, conversely, literary theory could profit from receiving empirical content from history and analytical self-criticism from rigorous philosophical thinking. In spite of the lack of dialogue, it is clear that the postmodern theorist, attempting to integrate theory, philosophy, and history, uses concepts that have traditionally linked rhetoric with the historical and philosophical inquiry into the nature of meaning in written texts. Literary theory today involves philosophical investigation into the nature of history. Understanding history demands an investigation into the categories that have traditionally determined the way we make sense of texts.

History is necessary to understand the categories that are in turn used to analyze the nature of history. This peculiar epistemological relation underlies one circularity that grounds literary theory, as well as most other areas of inquiry. It reflects the necessity of building knowledge upon the conceptual base that history places at our disposition. The necessity of conceptual bootstrapping is not what I refer to in my critiques of theory. In the following chapters I show that most models of literary theory are grounded in logically or tautologically circular arguments; and it is this kind of circularity that creates plausibility for the model. The circular relation accounts for the capacity that Hterary theory claims to have to account for everything. But from

the point of view of empirical history or analytical philosophy, this circularity leads to the vacuous nature of much theory. Definitions can generate worlds, but definitions can also be mere arrangements of words. If literary theory is to be more than an exercise in Humpty Dumpty assertions, it needs the confirmation of historical empiricism.

The present study, however, is not historical. It is written from an analytical and skeptical point of view. Using the applied skepticism that Raymond Queneau always recommended, I want to show that literary theories are grounded in disguised tautologies that strive to have the assurance of self-evident axioms. By tautology I mean a statement or axiom that is true by definition. In technical terms, tautologies are a priori definitions and are thus true without the need for experience to confirm or falsify them. The true is by definition the true, however we may then define what is true and look to see if anything is true. By definition it is true that unicorns have only one horn. The usefulness of this true statement is not perhaps immediately apparent. But it is true no matter what experience may teach me about the world.

It is not always easy to see if a statement or series of statements functions as a tautology. Before analysis, circular statements often appear to be empirical descriptions. Moreover, empirical descriptions can come to function as a priori tautologies or definitions. Statements can function as definitions that in a sense set out what we mean by the empirical verification they purport to offer. For example, in exploring the nature of "language games," Wittgenstein asks the following question: If under "normal conditions" water boils at l()()OC, is this statement true on empirical grounds or does it function as a definition of what water is? Or, in some sense, as both? Clearly, if under normal

conditions, we were to heat a clear liquid and find that it did not boil at one hundred degrees, we would have good reason to suspect that it was not water. By definition.

But what if we had some water that did not boil at one hundred degrees, would we be facing a theoretical or an empirical dilemma? In historical terms, it seems that our statement about water once functioned as an empirical description: this description was part of the work undertaken to quantify nature. But today it is more accurate to say that the statement functions as a definition, or as a tautology that goes to make up our worldview. It is one of the many definitions that we use to define what we mean by water and, in turn, to define many relationships involving water, heat, and identities quantifying the world. Tautologies, or definitions, are tools we use to bring order to the world and what we find in the world.

Definitions are part of knowledge, but the crucial issue for any theory is to set forth the criteria for how definitions are used in making models and applying them. Use is meaningful only if rules can be given that link the definition to a context. Context imposes the constraints of verification. Science or knowledge in any meaningful sense demands rules for verification. Verification is an issue, however, that is rarely brought up by literary theorists. It is a bit as if literary theorists had all read the philosopher of science Karl Popper and, having found they cannot meet his demands that they offer criteria for falsifying their models, had decided that verification is a pseudoissue for the humanities or social sciences. But modern epistemology hardly makes of falsification the only criterion for verification. Popper rejected evolution as a scientific theory on the grounds that there are no adequate grounds for falsifying it. Given this absurdity, it is reasonable to argue that if everything speaks

for a model, there is no need to find something to speak against it. But something must speak for it.

There is no single set of criteria for verification. Paleontology, neurology, and quantum mechanics cannot have exactly the same criteria Introduction 17 for verification. In some sciences the nature of their models demand, minimally, for verification the reproduction of the same results by more than one researcher under the same conditions (recall the recent comedy of trying to duplicate the low-temperature fusion of hydrogen atoms in several laboratories). Falsification can play an important role in this type of verification. But disciplines like astrophysics and paleobiology work in areas in which reproduction of results or falsification are largely pseudoissues because they are not possible. My point is, then, that each individual science- or form of knowledge-has its own protocols for confirmation or falsification or its results, even if ideally the universal applicability of procedures is a demand of science. One ideal goal of science is to formulate a testable hypothesis and therewith confirm a model that admits of universal application. In practice, each individual discipline must finally resort to various types of confirmation based on the rationality of their inquiry. They must content themselves with what the pragmatic philosopher Bas C. Van Fraassen calls the empirical adequacy of their results and recognize what the logician Willard Quine calls the possibility that multiple models may offer adequate explanations of the same empirical phenomena. I Literary theory has been by and large singularly remiss in bringing up these issues. The hostility that positivism once showed toward "soft" humanistic thought can no longer be used to justify this reticence. The conventionalist or antirealist stance of much philosophy of science would suggest that literary theory could find a home in the panoply of modem scientific theories that recognize the underdetermination of data. But

such has not been the case. Literary theory has largely failed to make explicit inquiry about its own epistemological status, except occasionally when theorists make vague condemnations of the "positivist sciences." Since positivism has been a dead issue in the philosophy of science, not to mention in science itself, for some years now, it is rather strange that literary theorists continue to beat a dead horse--0ne that, I doubt, they have ever ridden. Whatever be the weakness or positivistic theories of meaningful propositions, literary theorists should be a bit more grateful to the Vienna Circle for having cleared the air of a good many pseudoissues and for having promoted the antimetaphysical stance that, after Nietzsche and Heidegger, literary theorists often seem to want to make their own. (And literary theorists who denounce positivism should stop quoting a positivist like Heisenberg to "prove" that there is no ultimate reality in science.) Elementary honesty demands that we recognize that literary theorists offer descriptions of literature to which they ascribe truth values. One need not be a hostile critic of literary theory to point out that theorists implicitly make a claim for knowledge having universal validity when they adamantly reject theories and applications of theory that do not agree with their own theoretical work. When facing these claims to knowledge, one has every right to expect explicit procedures for the application and verification of theory. Literary theorists try to get around this expectation, contenting themselves with facile denunciations of some positivist strawman; and then they go on glibly to explain society, the psyche, and all history without meeting minimal demands for procedures of verification or confirmation-if not falsification-that other theoretical disciplines must meet. If literary theory has any claim to be knowledge, it should foreground the criteria by which one can see if it can be affirmed by an empirically adequate argument or if it functions as a logically valid deductive framework.

By now, if they have continued to read this far, I shall have encountered resistance in many theorists, especially if they view all knowledge as merely so many metaphors that approximate truth. Even science is only metaphor, they claim, and then smugly add that we literary theorists at least know we are dealing with metaphors. To which the rational skeptic can only retort that this view of panmetaphoricity-all is metaphor-is largely nonsense, or at most a trivial tautology. To describe all knowledge as metaphorical is part of the defensive stance that characterizes theorists who ought to be able to advance some reasoned defense of their claims to knowledge. It makes little logical or pragmatic sense to speak of genetics, particle physics, or plate tectonics as part of some metaphorical discourse. In fact, if all is metaphor, then nothing is metaphor, and we should get on with making some useful distinctions about what we can expect from theory, if anything. Metaphor may play a role in many types of discourse, but that is a matter of proof and demonstration-not an axiomatic point of departure.

Not all theorists try to turn science into poems. Marxists and most structuralists, semioticians, and historicists believe their theories propose objective knowledge. Even deconstructive theorists think that they are somehow working with the "scientificity of science," as the philosopher Jacques Derrida puts it when he declares, at the outset of 0 f Grammatology, that science is determined by logic and "the truth of presence." As a description of science, Derrida's contention is probably false, but the statement does suggest that literary theorists position themselves constantly vis-a-vis scientific determinations of truth and knowledge.

Upon hearing a critique of their theory, some theorists retort that coherence-not empirical adequacy or pragmatic

verification-is the basis for what they know--or for their paradoxical claim that they know Introduction 19 that it is true that there is no truth. The theory that coherence grounds theory brings us back to the tautologies that, I maintain, ground most theory. Tautologies are the basis of the coherence that underwrites literary theory, of which the prime model is "A is A". Can one derive the truth of a theory from such a first principle, much as Descartes derived the truth of the world from his first principle of certainty, the cogito? I doubt that coherence can suffice any more than a disguised tautology could grant Descartes metaphysical purchase on the world. But if literary theory is grounded in tautology, that verbal coherence may account for the way that literary theory is endowed with a cogency that seems to give it purchase on the world. As a coherent series of tautologies, literary theory is literary. Like a novel, it commands assent once one has accepted some basic axiom, the tautology that grounds it; and it commands assent all the more passionately in that this tautology is designed to give the theorist insight into a world of values and emotions that underwrite a worldview. This description of a theorist's commitment to theory might well apply to a reader's imaginative assent to a novel or a poem, with a notable exception: we usually do not confuse novels and poems with a theory that should offer testable hypotheses. We do not suffer a guilty conscience because novels and poems are not epistemologically grounded in the same way as relativity theory or virology.

Rather, as individual readers, we recognize that the hypothesis about the world that a poem, a novel, or a play offers is partial, one to be tested in terms of our personal experience, and that it does not exclude our entertaining other, differing hypotheses about the world that other novels and poems offer. (Theorists should note that poems and novels, unlike most literary theories, seem to confirm

with a vengeance Quine's belief in underdetermination, for poems and novels offer an indefinite and everproliferating number of models for explaining the world.) If the theory of a literary work is not a literary work, it seems that theorists do something different from what writers do. Do they do something different from scientists or philosophers? This claim has been made. For instance, Michel Foucault attempted to invent a new status for theory when he called Marx and Freud inventors of discursive practices and attempted to differentiate these practices from normal science, on the one hand, and from literature, on the other. The works of Marx and Freud, dixit Foucault, continue to be the basis for those theories that bear their names, whatever have been or will be the subsequent developments in their thought. This differs from science, since, if a study of Galileo's thought could revise our knowledge of the history of mechanics, it would not change our knowledge of the current state of the science. By contrast, a study of Freud's or Marx's work could transform what one means by psychoanalysis or Marxism. 2 Foucault invents a strange discourse if psychoanalysis or Marxism are forms of knowledge, for one wonders, logically, what explanatory powers are to be derived from theories that depend on historical interpretations of their founding texts. This view of a discursive practice makes it look like literature, for a reexamination of the works of Sophocles or Shakespeare could conceivably transform our present understanding of tragedy. Foucault's definition is an unsatisfactory way of granting some ambivalent status to discourses that are neither fish nor fowl, neither literature nor systematic knowledge. Theories are "practices" that have no special realm in which they have authorityunlcss it be, not surprisingly, ethics. Typically, Foucault's ultimate concern was to rethink the past in order to find an ethics, a "practice," and an ideology for the future. In this regard, Foucault is emblematic of the many theorists who cast about

for theories that can justify their fundamentally ethical and ideological concerns. Ethics is not literature, nor is it science. And, Plato and fundamentalists notwithstanding, ethics does not necessarily offer a theory of literature.

If literary theory is an ideology or a form of prescriptive reasoning, like an ethical code, then we may suggest that it has little to do with knowledge-though whether ethics is knowledge is a matter of debate today, as in Socrates' time. Some literary theorists do not want to justify their theory primarily as a way of promoting their ethics or politics.

Logically at least, theory is first of all some form of knowledge. Let me return again to the nature of tautologies and develop in greater detail this line of inquiry, for the power and ultimate weakness of literary theory can, I think, become most apparent if we have a better grasp of the nature of axioms of identity. Intuitively, we feel we can quickly define a "mere tautology" as something that is true by definition. It seems obvious when something is true as a statement of identity, or as an a priori assertion, because it is an analytic proposition. A tautology is true because it is what is logically the case. And for this reason we must subscribe a positive truth value to every tautology, such as A= A, or "All bachelors are unmarried men." This proposition about bachelors also sounds as if it were a descriptive truth, one with empirical value, though it is actually an analytical truth that depends logically on nothing in experience for its truth value. Bachelors are unmarried men, no matter what we might encounter in the world-yet somehow this statement seems to be constituent of something in our world. It is a definition that provides linkage between language and something we encounter in the world.

In addition to being definitions, tautologies can also take the form of logical truths. In a widely used text, An Introduction

to the Philosophy of Science, philosophers Lambert and Brittan concede that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to give a precise standard for distinguishing between logical and descriptive propositions. But we can look closely at propositions and note how terms are used. For example, the logical proposition that "All men are men" can be parsed as containing two types of words. "All" and "are" are logical words; "men" is a descriptive word.

And thus: any statement that remains true under any and all substitutions of descriptive words or phrases it contains is a logical truth. Alternatively we could say that logical truths are true statements that contain only logical words essentially. 3 For the purposes of our analysis here, it is essential to grasp that analytical propositions or logical truths containing only "or" and/or "not" can also be called tautological. In terms of logical symbolism, P v -Pis the most succinct expression of this tautological relationship.

This either/or nature of tautological statements is what allows them to enter, often unnoticed, into the arguments and strategies of much literary theory. And it is the unperceived tautology that is the object of this study.

For example, when a theorist says that literary intent is either conscious or unconscious, the theorist has offered a tautological statement even though the theorist may think that this statement has empirical content.

This proposition will have empirical content only if it is used in some way that provides empirical confirmation. But in its initial form the proposition either is or it isn't: P v -P. So, it is largely to these types of tautologies, to these often implicit tautologies, that I shall be attentive in the following pages. Logical truths and definitions can take many guises and function in many different ways, but framing logical

oppositions is doubtlessly the primary strategy for launching a theoretical model.

For many literary theorists, the recognition that many of their statements are tautologies offers no conceptual problem. As literary scholars, they are already inclined to view language as a kind of prism through which one views the world. They often believe that language allows us to "see" a world. The power of a logical truth is that it can be as much of an optical instrument as a descriptive truth. Skepticism about visual metaphors is probably the only reasonable stance when it comes to language, but if the theorist believes that language allows one to view the world, then a priori truths can be construed as ready-made prisms for revealing reality and disclosing knowledge. The confusions attendant upon the view that language allows vision give rise to a metaphysical idealism that is admittedly very powerful in its metaphorical appeal.

Language appears as a light, or as a mirror, indeed as a set of viewing glasses, all conceived as an instrument allowing the vision that discloses knowledge of what is. In Western culture, this view is fostered by the biblical notion that language and light-lumen-are joined as the advent of the Word and the light of truth. Moreover, literary theorists are inclined to be misled by the way definitions can be accompanied by images of what is defined. I have a good image of a unicorn-in fact, many images of it dancing and prancing-but the definition that seems to give unicorns license to dance does not give me knowledge of anything I expect to find running about in my yard. And a definition, or a meaning, is not knowledge of a world beyond that definition. That A is A says nothing about A's relation to the world.

Literary theorists are all too ready, moreover, to make use of theorists of science like Thomas Kuhn. In The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Kuhn proposes that scientific "paradigms" are essentially worldviews that nothing justifies except acceptance by a scientific community. One "sees" a different world according to the scientific paradigm one accepts, which is to say that scientific models are to be considered self-sustaining verbal artifacts that focus vision and for which no ultimate proof is possible or even necessary. A scientific paradigm is true for the community that accepts it when the community in question says that it is true. And the paradigm will seem true as long as the community "looks" through the prism that the paradigm provides for viewing reality. All of science seems to be a priori from Kuhn's point of view, which he argues with intelligence and elegance. Kuhn seems to argue as if the nature of knowledge were merely to be a series of self-sustaining tautologies.

There is no rational foundation for science if it is simply a self-sustaining vision. Kuhn's viewpoint neglects the role of experiment and prediction in science. Since this neglect of experimentation flies so patently in the face of what science does and how science is grounded, most philosophers of science as well as scientists reject Kuhn out of hand.

Kuhn is a persuasive writer, but literary theorists should take heed: there is more than one philosopher of science in the world, and the one literary theorists all ritually quote is largely dismissed by his professional critics.

This question of "vision" is important, nonetheless, for it is plausible to argue that theory is validated on the basis of what it lets us "see." This is not quite the same as saying that observation validates a theory. Some theorists claim that theory allows observation of what would not be seen

without the theory. This observation in turn validates theory that allows the seeing to take place. A circularity lurks at the heart of this model, and most philosophers of science alert us to this problem. It is not easy to sort out what is theory and what is observation, since, as Quine puts it most laconically, "the notion of observation is awkward to analyse."4 An "antirealist" of pragmatic persuasion like Van Fraassen presses the issue, Introduction 23 for the hermeneutic circularity I have just described could cause us to believe that our knowledge is encapsulated in itself. Van Fraassen recognizes that we may well accept the circular structure of the logic of a scientific model, yet we are not at all obliged to contend that this offers us any power of vision, or that a model in some sense organizes a selfaffirming vision of the world: To accept the theory involves no more belief ... than that what it says about observable phenomena is correct. To delineate what is observable, however, we must look to science-and possibly to the same theory-for that is also an empirical question. This might produce a vicious circle if what is observable were itself not simply a fact disclosed by theory, but rather theory-relative or theory-dependent. It will already be quite clear that I deny this; I regard what is observable as a theory-independent question. It is a function of facts about us qua organisms in the world. 5 This passage points up that on this issue of vision we find a conflict between those theorists for whom language precedes experience and those for whom the world of observation is ultimately independent of the models we bring to bear on it. Many literary theorists are willing to subscribe to the idea that language "always already" brings a picture of the world determined by metaphysics. To which the skeptical rationalist can retort that, beyond the picture of the world that a model may present-and any picture is partial-a model can only be judged by what we can do with it, whether it is informed by metaphysics or not. Literary theorists are generally not pragmatists: what can one do

with their theories? The immediate pragmatic payoff is hard to see. Does this mean that literary theories are not to be held accountable to some test of experience beyond the "vision" they purport to offer? The belief that even vision is theory-laden is found everywhere in contemporary literary theories. Exemplary is the case of a theorist like the structuralist-Marxist Louis Althusser, who certainly thought of himself as a scientist and who, in rewriting Marx, became one of the major influences on Marxist theory today. Acknowledging his debt to the early work of the philosopher Michel Foucault, Althusser asserts in Lire le Capital (Reading Capital) that science can pose a problem only upon a terrain situated within the horizon of a defined theoretical ~tructure: Through it we gain access to the understanding of the determination of the visible as visible, and conjointly of the invisible as the invisible. Visible is any object or problem that is situated on the terrain and within the horizon, which is to say, within the defined structural field of the theoretical problematic of a given theoretical discipline. We must take these words quite literally. Seeing is no longer a matter of an individual subject, endowed wiU1 the faculty of "seeing" that he might exercise, be it attentively, be it distractedly; seeing is a matter of structural conditions, it is the relation of immanent reflection of the field of inquiry upon its objects and its problems. 6 Althusser's epistemology endorses a historical relativism similar to that of a Foucaull or a Kuhn. Seeing is a matter of theory, or, conversely, without theory, one cannot see. Drawing upon this kind of epistemology, literary theory has the task of describing the horizon within which we sec what literature ultimately is.

The question of vision is perplexing and should be described in more nuanced terms. For, if it seems undeniable that seeing is facilitated by theoretical constructs, it also seems perverse to say that all vision is determined by theory. We

do have vision for which we have no explanation, and hence no theory. There is innocent vision. With his usual ingenuity, Quine has suggested that observational sentences are theory-laden, but only in retrospect. It is only after observational terms come to be associated with theoretical sentences that the "once innocent observation sentences are theory-laden indeed." However, most claims that observation sentences are products of theory are guilty of the "fallacy of conceptual retrojcction." 7 We should bear this fallacy in mind in considering the recurrent vexing question as to whether logical truths, which anchor theoretical systems, offer vision. Do we project vision onto analytical statements retrospectivcly---oncc we have become seduced by the a priori logic of the analytical propositions? As I suggested earlier, analytical propositions often appear to be empirical sentences. The rigid opposition of tautologics---or definitions and logical truths-and of empirical or observational truths is not as rigid as tradition has supposed. To remain with that diabolical logician Quine, we should take into account his argument, one still open to debate, contesting the dichotomous nature of the opposition. In his now canonical paper "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Quine suggests that the belief in purely analytical truths and purely empirical ones has functioned as two self-supporting dogmas of a limited empiricism, one that held that "every meaningful statement is held to be translatable into a statement (true or false) about immediate experience." Sounding surprisingly like Althusser, Quine views all "fields" of knowledge as having contact with experience only on the periphery: total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience: If this view is right, it is misleading to speak of the empirical content of an individual statement--especially if it is a statement at all remote from the Introduction 25 experiential periphery of the field. Furthermore it becomes folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements,

which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. Even a statement very close to the periphery can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws. Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision.

Revision even of the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics. 8 While I would certainly like to see quantum mechanics simplified, I do have some doubts about how revising the law of the excluded middle will apply to the world in which I read literary texts. However, Quine brings up an interesting point. Many of the logical contortions of literary theory show that he has accurately described the commitment to theory: it is always possible to adjust periphery statements in such a way that the empirical world need never touch upon the center of the theory-the tautological center that we shall presently describe.

Refutations of Quine with regard to the necessity of maintaining the analytical-empirical distinction seem convincing. Quine's point is well taken, however, with regard to the way the same statement may in the course of time function sometimes as an observational statement and sometimes, within the core of the field, as a definition and be seemingly shielded from experience. Contemporary thought thus undermines the Kantian distinction drawing sharp boundaries between synthetic statements and analytic statements-but it does not do away with the distinction. And I take the main importance of the arguments generated by Quine' s work and its refutations to

be that we must look at the way propositions function to determine what kind of propositions they are.

We must be alert to sentences and propositions that look as if they were about the world but that are really sentences about conditions of linguistic usage; and alert to sentences that do offer observations about what obtains in the world. We must not confuse the two, as, it seems to me, is often the case in literary theory, and thus confuse what are the truth conditions in question.

By my lights, some of the most pertinent, but also misleading, observations about truth conditions are found in Wittgenstein's investigation of propositions as he develops them in the description of language games in the Philosophical Investigations, and later in works like On Certainty. Tue truth of our empirical sentences, he maintains, belongs to our system of reference. Within a given system or language game, what appear to be empirical sentences-Erfahrungssiitze-may well be definitions or tautologies. It is then clearly an error to extrapolate from a given system of propositions or language game and make of a logical sentence some kind of universal observational sentence.

However, Wittgenstein thought that what we acquired through learning language games is not simply a series of empirical propositions but rather the basis for the worldview that allows us to evaluate the truth claims of empirical sentences: I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false. 9 While this viewpoint may apply to traditional societies, it is hardly what contemporary rationalist empiricism means by knowledge. I accept much that I cannot immediately demonstrate; but I know, if need be, how my worldview can

be confirmed, or at least what probability can be vouchsafed it. This is what I mean by knowledge, and Wittgenstein's doubt about the foundations of a worldview seem at odds with what he says about the way we play those language games that constitute knowledge.

Wittgenstein's ambiguities about ultimately grounding knowledge are relevant for understanding literary theory. Literary theory is, for many theorists, often more like a worldview or a totalizing picture of the world than some limited scientific theory sharply delimited by what can be demonstrated. For those longing for "totality," literary theory offers a backdrop against which all else is evaluated-and as Wittgenstein often observed, if one does not simply accept this background as a given, there is no rational basis for contending that it is right or wrong. This explains the power of literary theory as a worldview. The worldview or background is that against which right and wrong, truth and falsity are measured, and the worldview itself cannot be called into question.

Moreover, the notion of worldview in its globality offers an instructive analogy with the function attributed by many to literary theory. For many theorists-in spite of the eclectic tendencies natural to literary studiesthere is no ordered hierarchy of theories such as one finds in the natural sciences (proceeding from particle physics and going to astronomy with chemistry, biology, and geology occupying intermediary strata with increasingly wider scopes of application). Literary theories want to be unitary explanations of literary texts. They want to explain how texts explain a worldvicw and, in circular fashion, want to use the worldview to explain the text-such as in the case of Marxist thought, or a certain Introduction 27 structuralist paradigm, or of Lacanian psychoanalysis (the latter having been used to explain everything from the origins of

language to the foundations of mathematics). In other words, literary theory wants to be the totalizing backdrop against which all can be explained.

Wittgenstein is salutary in his stress upon how we must look at the way propositions really do function in the language games we play, be it in science, in everyday business transactions, or in framing theories about human relations within society. Some sentences demand to be tested by experience and at other times used as a rule for testing. Is the belief in the dominance of the ruling class in ideological production confirmed by inductive experience, or is this belief really an a priori rule that allows one to know when one is confronting the ruling class? In the latter case, is this belief part of a worldview-but not necessarily a form of knowledge? Literary theorists are usually proposing a totalizing worldview to which they are emotionally committed, often with a nearly religious sense of fervor. They are prepared to defend this worldview at once with, and in spite of, all the empirical evidence. From this perspective we see that experience can never finally totally impinge upon a theory-though it may well render a theory useless for all but the most committed. I propose the following thought experiment to show how a committed theorist might defend her worldview against empirical examples that demand "adjustment." Let us suppose I meet a literary theorist who says that literature functions to keep us from having bad dreams and is therefore necessary for social well-being. The traditional Kantian philosopher would wonder what proof the theorist has for this synthetic a posteriori proposition that seems to say something about a state of affairs in the world. To say that novels keep us from having bad dreams does not seem to be a definition or a logical truth-nor does the corollary proposition that novels and poems have an essential function in maintaining social well-being. No predicate is contained logically within the

subject, unless of course we simply allow the theorist to define a novel or poem as anything that keeps us from having bad dreams. In which case it may be that there are no poems or novels. However, if this claim is framed as an empirical statement, it is only with difficulty that I can imagine what might constitute some verification of it. It is easy to imagine falsifying the statement, and so the philosopher tells the wouldbe theorist that it seems obvious that many people read novels and poems but nonetheless have bad dreams.

Precisely, replies the theorist in a move to adjust her theory to the meager counterdemonstration; bad dreams are an immanent expression of our being in the world. Without literature, the theorist says, we would be constantly inundated with bad dreams. With this "adjustment," the theorist claims that bad dreams are a definition of our being, and that her theory of literature is a logical consequence of this worldview. We are either entertaining bad dreams or we are not entertaining bad dreams: A or -A. With the corollary definition, the presence of bad dreams confirms her theory, and so does the absence of bad dreams, since the function of this theory of literature is really to demonstrate the correctness of a worldview built upon a priori notions. No experience can assail a worldview, for all empirical examples of the presence and absence of bad dreams are explained by the initial definition of our being in the world. This "confirmation" is a brief example of the strength of tautology.

Of course, usually more than a single tautology is involved in producing a worldview that is rationalized by or as a theory. Values and desires are equally as important. Let us imagine a second theorist who, with strong political motivation, attacks the first theorist for mere "psychologizing," for the politically minded theorist would

have categories for explaining a deviant or "incorrect" theory. These categories harmonize the very existence of the deviant theory with a worldview that the politically minded theorist proposes as correct. The category of deviance is necessary to show the superior explanatory powers of the "correct" theory. Imagine thus a politically minded theorist who defines literature as always being the expression of the repressed classes. This statement can function as much as a definition as an inductive proposition, since what is clearly not the expression of the repressed can be dismissed or defined as something other than literature. Since it is virtually an a priori given that in any society there have always been classes that can be defined as dominant or repressed, it stands to reason that literature defined as expression must be the expression of one or the other (A v -A). The very nature of literature makes it clear, says the political theorist, that literature has always been the expression of the suffering class: consider tragedies, Christian morality dramas, realist novels, absurdist fictions and plays, etc. This list seems inductive, though within the context, the individual types only serve to illustrate the scope of the definition. History appears to affirm the adequacy of this definition of literature, all the more so in that history is defined as an unfolding tautology (due nod to Hegel here): history is the process by which the expression of suffering comes to self-realization in self-reflexive statements about itself. And any failure to grasp the self-reflexive nature of this historical process is a form of deviance known as psychologizing.

In psychologizing, the individual subject is granted a power that properly belongs to history and the suffering class. Only a member of the Introduction 29 dominant class, suffering guilt in the form of bad dreams, could be guilty of not understanding the "true" theory that shows that literature is the expression of the repressed masses.

This bit of caricature may serve to illustrate Wittgenstein's and Quine's notion that we never really believe a single proposition but rather a whole system of propositions-for all theory entails implicit as well as explicit propositions. We adjust our propositions to each other as we learn a totality of propositions, though of course certain propositions are deemed more fundamental than others. However, I am not willing to follow Wittgenstein when he considers that ultimately our systems are not grounded. (Or, as Wittgenstein says, with hyperbole, in No. 166 of On Certainty, "The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.") If we do indeed largely inherit the worldview against which we make sense of our propositions, the theorist's task is to ground theory within the context of a worldview that most of us accept---or to produce a theory that can advance reasons why we should consider it knowledge.

Part of the inherited worldview of post-Enlightenment culture is that theorists should seek to justify their theories. This belief in the need for justification may not be part of the worldview of other cultures. But it is absurd to pretend that the need for confirmation and justification is not part of our worldview-and justifiably so on empirical grounds. Rational empiricism once perhaps had to struggle to impose itself, but the history of reason has come to make of empirical confirmation an almost tautological definition of truth. The triumph of liberal democratic political values, I note, has coincided with the triumph of democratic procedures for publicly verifying claims to truth in the field of knowledge. Theorists can of course reject this historical process of reason and embrace various irrationalisms. But this means the end of communication. It is not possible to communicate with a skinhead screaming Sieg Heil or with a theorist who exalts contradiction. Most literary theorists do not wish to commit intellectual suicide. Therefore, they are as

accountable to the same broad standards of knowledge as any other theorist.

One additional point perhaps should be made here at the outset.

Theorists are often writers, philosophers, or professors of literature. They take language seriously and work as writers. Yet the claims of theory seem to be a claim to science in some broad sense. But we know that literary theorists do not set up controlled physical situations in which facts can be demonstrated or events can be predicted. Theorists write; we might say that they create structures of intelligibility in language. As writers, theorists often seem to believe that theory, like literature, highlights structures of intelligibility in language-and structure here is a metaphor for our perception of recurrences in language. It would seem that literary theory has an appeal involving imagination and the kind of imaginary constructs that language allows. Marxists create verbal structures that propose a coherent structure about certain features of the real-as they define the real-in which every human drama can be situated in terms of the class struggles that presumably unfold to create that great narrative called history. And Freudian theorists create structures that reflect dramas obtaining between self and world, individual psyches and verbal constructs like history and world. All of this is undertaken in language about language, about ideological constructs in language, or about bodily symptoms read as a language. For literary theory purports to explain, in general terms, linguistic structures-novels, poems, and plays-by elaborating structures of intelligibility in language. No Freudian ever set up conditions by which she might falsify, in the realm of empirical reality, one of her narratives about a narrative, any more than any Marxist ever figured out how to predict an event that might validate his view of what literature

represents (though Marxists have frequently predicted the outcome of history). The metalinguistic nature of literary theory may account at once for its encapsulation upon itself and the fact that theorists often blissfully ignore any call for confirmation of their theories.

Literary theorists work in language, which perhaps restates the belief that they work in the realm of worldviews. Language is held to be the key to the articulation of worldviews. Many literary theories work with the probably false assumption that language is the key to understanding what it is to be human and what it means to produce such typically human products, in language, as novels and poems. Theorists then use the identification of the human and language to fashion an analytical statement, stipulating humanity, culture, and language as coterminous.

This dubious tautology might begin with something like the recognition that, without language, there is no meaning, for how can one say what one means without saying what one means. This implies that without language there is no human world of shared meanings-for in a priori terms what we mean by this assertion is that the defining characteristic of humanity is to share human meanings (I think this is the meaning of Wittgenstein's assertion that if a lion could speak, we couldn't understand it in any case). Language is meaning, for how could we speak of meaning except by language, e.g., by speaking of meaning. And since language exists before any individual's mastery of language, it can be argued that we are all subordinated to language, or constituted, as humans, by language. This is again a tautological assertion to the extent that it means we are human beings only insofar as we are human beings, e.g., we have language. One can change the emphasis of this tautology, Introduction 31 then, and claim, with Heidegger, that language speaks us-a tautology meaning that human

beings are human beings, e.g., they are born and then learn a language that precedes their existence. If these beings are to become human beings, this means by definition that they become beings endowed with language. Aristotle said much the same thing.

This hyperevaluation of the role of language in our cultural concerns characterizes postmodernity, and it finds expression in the credence accorded literary theories simply because they are a type of construct in language. Tautologies exist only in language, some kind of language, be it in the formalized language of the various logical symbolisms that the last century has developed; be it in traditional a priori statements of identity and definition. One may cast a longing glance upon the world; one will never encounter a tautology walking down the street or taking place in some public or private space sheltered from language. I foreground this perhaps not entirely obvious point, since I want to investigate the grasp that tautologies have on our imagination. We know that they do not take place in the empirical world, only in the world of language, and yet it appears that the world of objects and events would not be able to exist in the same way it does exist for us if tautologies did not hold true. Perhaps this is an illusion, an illusion with roots in metaphysics. Tautologies seem to have an existential weight, or a purchase upon the world of objects and events, that a simply logical definition should not grant them. In their pristine necessity, tautologies seem to point to some connection between language and world, between the power of thought and reality, that we cannot pin down with any great precision. If A were not A, what would happen? If definitions did not hold in the world, what would become of the world? One can hazard the guess that nothing would happen, although, without language, we would not know it.

Yet, it is foolish to attribute some power to the logical necessity that exists only in language. Believing in the power of identity, the naive can arrive at the most outlandish myths or metaphysics, for the guiles of logos are endlessly seductive. Starting usually from an implicit sense that logical necessity is somehow the same as causal sufficiency, one can quickly arrive at metaphysical system building. Hegel's reasonable view that there are necessarily antecedent states--0r sufficient causes-in history led him, through applying the power of tautology, to confusing necessary and sufficient causes and then to reading history as the great book of necessary causes-in which the necessary and the sufficient are conflated in great confusion. If A is A, then it must necessarily be A because of some operative causality in the world, and, with this error confusing logical necessity with causality, historical necessity springs forth as misapplied tautology. Of necessity all states have antecedent states: if there were in perpetuity only one state, then there would be no states, since there would be no difference. Thus, by definition there must be antecedent states in history, or there is no history-which is a point that Parmenides tried to argue. So a confused refutation of monism declares that A is A because it must be A, and what is, is of necessity. As this example shows, tautologies are often hidden, and failure to recognize them can, as in Hegel's vision of necessity in history, lead to rather grandiose claims about what one has discovered through pseudological exercises in thought. Contemporary theory often repeats the same confusion.

The belief in the power of tautological theory derives also from the contemporary view that literature itself functions something like a tautology. Contemporary theory would be a theory of linguistic structures that, like a series of definitions, somehow impose themselves as they order a world, a world in language.

Something like this belief seems to lie behind much postmodern theory about literature. When reading a novel, we accept that language is world and, therefore, that everything the novel (or poem or play) proposes exists by definition. Madame Bovary is Madame Bovary. The theory that tautology grounds a world of literary discourse derives from the romantic belief in the autonomy of literary discourse, which in turn underlies contemporary theories as diverse as hermeneutics, semiotics and poststructuralism, as well as earlier critical theories. And belief in the power of tautology, often implicit belief, finds support in the idea that literary propositions function something like analytic truths in that they are "true" by definition. One cannot, at least within the confines of the novel, doubt that Madame Bovary is Madame Bovary (unless the writer uses a rhetoric that demands that one doubt what is stated within the work). If literature can be regarded as a tautology, then it can be argued that literature is what the structuralist Barthes once called an adventure in logic: "What takes place" in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally nothing; "what happens" is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming. JO Barthes's hyperbole points to an attitude that makes of theory an activity that sees itself charged with explaining the tautologies that make up literary worlds. Theory wants then to borrow from the way literary works organize a world: they structure a world and the meanings that are constitutive thereof, and thus they seem to give knowledge of the world Introduction 33 in the same way as do statements that must earn empirical confirmation.

As metatautologies, theoretical statements may even appear superior to those empirical statements that are subject to falsification and replacement at some unknown day in the future. Barthes's euphoria springs from the security offered by tautologies.

Yet euphoria is not knowledge; neither, in any interesting sense, are metatautologies. And there are more interesting ways of talking about the language of literature than using metaphors stressing autonomy and logic. And so we return to the question as to whether literary theory offers knowledge comparable to theoretical knowledge, which demands rigorous confirmation. Literary theory desires to answer questions about why things happen, why and how structures and meanings are organized the way they are in literary texts, and what and why literary texts do what they do in the world. But theory inevitably ends up trying to harmonize literary texts with the worldview the theory wants to propagate. This is not exegesis in any traditional sense, nor is it deductive argumentation.

Theorizing often consists in using literary texts to make the texts support the worldview and ideology that the theorist advances as true in some sense. But, as I hope now to show, most of the worldviews called theory are essentially tautological scaffoldings designed to prop up an ideology.

Marxist theory receives first consideration. Not only is it most venerable in date, a living nineteenth-century museum piece, but it is also most tenacious in its will to explain literature-or to use literature to demonstrate the power of the theorist's political ideology. Marxists and quasi Marxists abound in the academy, if they are scarcely to be encountered elsewhere in the Western (or Eastern) world today. Not least of interest then is the question as to why Marxist theory continues in literary studies after the death of Marxism in every other domain. The following chapter on Freud faces somewhat analogous enigmas in that orthodox Freudians are more likely to be found in literary studies than in any other discipline, including psychology or psychiatry. For purposes of organization, I reserve the Lacanian variant of Freudian theory for the end of the book, since some

familiarity with Freud and structuralism is presupposed by Lacanian theory. After Freud, I turn to the historicizing hermeneutics of Heidegger and Foucault, and then to structuralism, before dealing with poststructuralism in the thought of Lacan and Derrida. This is hardly an exhaustive critique of literary theory. But it is a critique of the most important literary theories; and therewith I hope to demonstrate my thesis about their generally tautological nature. Llke Alice before Humpty Dumpty, I make no final judgment as to whether theory has any value, though it is clear that I regard literary theory's claims to knowledge to be excessive and at times naive. The debate about literary theory may say something about the nature of language.

Language has many ruses, and consideration of them may contribute to the ongoing debate as to why and if we should give literary theory as much time and energy as we do. Perhaps we should not. Or perhaps we should simply become more modest practitioners of poetics. No one expects other disciplines to have a theory of the world and everything in it. The world does not in any case, or only by pun, exist by definition, except perhaps Humpty Dumpty's.

Marxism and Literary Theory

Marx himself might have trouhle explaining why, after the decline of Marxism as a force in Western politics, Marxism remains a force in the university departments of literary studies. From a Marxist viewpoint, the role of these literature departments had been the propagation of bourgeois ideology. Today, these departments arc virtually the only place where radical political thought can still be found. Marxism in various forms persists residually, though influentially, usually in the form of literary theories asserting that they arc also radical political criticism. It is rare,

however, that one encounters overtly militant Marxism calling for the end of bourgeois society and its literature. More typically, Marxism is stirred into an eclectic conceptual brew in which Marx's thought is the dominant theoretical ingredient. Feminism, multiculturism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, or semiotics often call upon Marxism, though these arc difficult alliances. Marxism usually ends up relegating other theoretical concerns to a secondary role in explaining the "social totality." The totalizing nature of Marxist theory probably explains why nearly all theory about literature, desirous of an overtly radical political slant, usually ends up embracing a Marxist worldvicw: no other political ideology joins concerns with poetics and politics with the same conceptual sweep.

It is appropriate to ask why the great tradition of Western liberalism has, in recent years, produced no political theory of literature. If all Western political thought begins with either Locke or Marx, why has the Lockean tradition not produced a political theory of poetics? Perhaps it is in the very nature of political Jiheralism to recognize the autonomy of 35 literature; liberalism subscribes to the view that literature is a domain in which prescriptive political or ethical demands have no central role when it comes to understanding what literature is. That position is a corollary to the basic political axiom of Jiberalism: tolerance. It seems contradictory to prescribe what should be tolerated. I make this point aside from all concerns with a scientific or philosophical theory of literature, one which aims at describing what literature is, not what it should be. When pursuing political or ethical goals, liberals, like anyone else, may favor literature that favors those goals. Or they may not, for literature is not a political party. Much of the literature I find attractive is often written from an ideological viewpoint that I find repugnant. Nor is literature a recipe for correct behavior. Literature may, or may not, have ethical

consequences, but, from a theoretical point of view, this must be demonstrated, not assumed. It is a prescriptive use of tautology to define literature as texts that reinforce the moralist's ethics. We shall examine this in greater detail presently.

Tolerance is not a basic principle for Marxism or Marxists who mix descriptive and prescriptive notions with great abandon, often using one to buttress the other. The desire to prescribe undoubtedly explains why those theorists who are more interested in ethics than in literature are often drawn to Marxist theory. Our immediate concern here, however, is not the relationship of ethics and literature but rather the conceptual underpinning of descriptive Marxism and its claim to be knowledge.

Specifically, what are the epistemological grounds for the theoretical axiom that literature is a reflection of society? What justifies saying that the ultimate determinate of meaning in a literary work is societal in nature? This descriptive statement makes a claim to the knowledge one can gain using Marxist theory, and the proposition should be kept logically separate from the Marxist's ethical argument that literature has an ethical obligation to reflect correctly social conditions.

Some Marxist theorists, like Lucien Sebag in Marxisme et structuralisme, have argued that utopian knowledge can only be promoted by a scientific analysis of what is not realized in contemporary society. I take this to mean that ethical knowledge is then in some sense dependent on or even derivative from scientific knowledge, which thus has a claim to priority. Theory qua theory remains independent of ethical positions, though it may contribute to the analysis of ethical and political situations.

The confusion of description and prescription characterizing many of the acolytes of social change does not per se incriminate Marxism's theoretical validity. Marxism as a theory of society and all that society includes-a science of the totality that includes social classes, poems, and teapots-stands as a theoretical system that could conceivably be 1 I recognized as true by the most hardened reactionary, were some form of validation offered by the theory.

The course of history was or is to provide that validation, with the triumph of the proletariat. Most Marxists do not today insist on the eschatological side of Marx, for the belief in the inevitable triumph of socialism has received little empirical confirmation. The inevitable victory of socialism strikes me as still fundamental to Marxist analysis, though there is nothing in Marxist thought that insists on a rigid timetable for the collapse of capitalism. The light in the East has dimmed, but nothing in Marx called for revolution there. So recent history need not be taken necessarily as a falsification of the basic theory that Marx set up for the analysis of history and society. And the lack of falsification, rather than any confirmation, may justify this theory in the eyes of those wanting a revolutionary political theory of literature and culture. Political revolution remains a past fact and a future desideratum for Marxist analysis. Granted that the world could be improved, the rationalist critic must nonetheless ask how this theory arrives at a knowledge of facts that might support its analysis, as well as its desires.

Our focus here is literary theory, though, in the case of Marxism, literary theory is not to be separated from a theory of history and culture.

Marxist literary theory is part of a "materialist" philosophy according to which the means of production are directly or indirectly responsible for the production of ideology-and by

ideology Marxists mean all the beliefs, representations, and ideas that go to make up our world view.

From a non-Marxist viewpoint, Marxism is a worldview that can account for the production of other worldviews, such as those found in novels and poems. Literature can be considered an important part of ideology--or a minor part if we consider the little consideration given to literature by an exemplary Marxist such as Marx himself. Whatever may be the importance of literature, Marxist theory maintains that the class that owns the means of production also produces the ideology that a given society uses to justify the status quo, this being the status desired by the ruling class. Dominant ideology is expressed as a worldview that the ruling class, as well as society at large, takes to describe the nature of things-exception made for enlightened revolutionary movements that are the motor force of history.

Revolutionary movements come into existence in spite of the causal relationships governing the production of ideology, for contradictions in the "infrastructure" can produce changes of consciousness in the "superstructure." Marxists use a metaphor spatializing culture to describe the relationship of material conditions and ideology, with economic "reality" serving as a bedrock upon which to build the rest. During the course of history, the economic infrastructure has determined all that makes up the ideological superstructure: literature as well as religion, political thought, philosophy, and all other components of the dominant worldview. It is not clear where science is situated in modem Marxist theory, for recent Marxism has been split between those for whom Marxism is another science and those for whom science, except Marxism, is another expression of bourgeois ideology.

With its theoretical knowledge, Marxist theory can describe the conditions that will lead necessarily to a transformation of society that will rid society of the evils that Marxist theory describes as the contradictions in capitalist society. Marxism's quasi-prescriptive description of politics finds its underpinnings in knowledge of the nature of history. Descriptive knowledge of the nature of history tells how these contradictions will eliminate themselves precisely because it is in the nature of contradictions to be unstable. Marx latched onto Hegelian dialectic to found his science of history, and several generations of revolutionaries have had to ponder how historical change is explained by a dialectical theory in which antecedent stages of social development give rise necessarily to subsequent changes. Marx himself saw surplus value, or the free labor that workers gave capitalists, as the most egregious contradiction in the capitalism of his time. Marxists today have a different agenda, though economic exploitation has, needless to say, hardly disappeared as part of the Marxist analysis of social contradictions and iniquities.

For the non-Marxist observer, the question arises today: Why do a good many literary scholars want to enlist dialectical materialism in the study of literature? Obviously, literature has something to do with society-a great deal, depending on the definitions of literature and society-but there is something counterintuitive about the idea that literary works always reflect class interests. And it seems scientifically naive to believe that literature is produced by some mechanical causality.

Nor is there anything self-evident about the claim of more recent Marxist theory declaring that literary works maintain some "homology" of structure with ideology. Without further examination, it is in fact equally as plausible to maintain that literary structures are transhistorical. One answer to

this question about Marxism's literary longevity is found by turning to Marxist theory and analyzing the way it constitutes a system of belief that offers scholars power over literary texts-if not the power in the social world that these theorists desire. Contemporary Marxism offers a worldview that in tum declares literature to be a privileged way of getting a handle on understanding ideology and, from there, insight into the ethical conflict and political power struggles that the uninitiated ignore. Whatever be the psychological analysis that one cares to bring to 1 I understanding why there are Marxists, one must first grasp the logical moves that Marxism offers.

It is through a series of logical moves that the Marxist theorist is empowered to grasp what Marxists call the social totality. In understanding the totality, the Marxist can perforce explain why liberals and other non-Marxists do not have the power to see the true social relations and conflict inscribed in literary texts. Granted the totalizing knowledge of his theory, the Marxist theorist enjoys vision unavailable to other readers. Unlike the rhetorician concerned with the protocols of meaning and semantics, or the scientist operating within some circumscribed realm of theory and proof, the Marxist literary theorist takes on finally the entire universe of human significations as they are articulated by ideology.

This is the agenda of the totalizing theory of Marxist anthropology.

This totalizing worldview is at once grandiose, especially as a pedagogical practice, and often vacuous, for concrete social problems are usually dealt with at a level of abstraction that simply results in the ritual repetition of the basic elements of the Marxist model.

Marxist conceptions of a totality begin by developing the implications of a rather crude tautology, though this tautology mobilizes an impressive array of concepts. Marx offered the insight that the ideological superstructure exists to justify the economic infrastructure. In the vernacular of the theory, the Marxist materialist ontology recognizes the necessary priority of the material realm. But the foundations of this ontology should be translated into the more fundamental observation that all cultural production must come after meeting the material needs of existence. In brief, one must eat before one writes. The most idealist of philosophers cannot write if she has died of not meeting the material needs of existence. The axiom is clear: one must produce in order to produce. Matter comes before spirit. 1-'or, conversely, as Humpty Dumpty might point out, if you are dead, you are not alive-and logically cannot be a writer. This caricature points up to a certain necessity of being a Marxist, for one can hardly quarrel with the rational circularity that in this logical sense makes the means of production anterior to the production of ideology. Production is logically antecedent to nonproduction; or, what can exist, exists only when production exists. As a definition, the materialist ontology is unassailable.

But this definition turns on a rational circularity that is strictly verbal.

It is only when Marx then conflates the necessity of antecedent states with causal necessity that the tautology begins to look as if it says something interesting about the world. As I pointed out in the introduction, this is the logical confusion in Hegel that allows him to turn a tautology into the course of history. The confusion of the logical necessity of antecedent temporal states with some causal necessity allows the theorist to invest a definition with metaphysical powers that mere logical order cannot possess. Or, quite

simply, eating may be antecedent to writing; but that involves no causal connection. The observation that I must meet the material necessities of existence in order to exist says nothing about how I may exist, or even about how I may arrange the production of those necessities. I exist when I exist, to be sure, and not before, but that does not imply that necessity is at work before or after that state.

Even more metaphysics is at work in Marxism, however, than is suggested by this rough description of the first axiom of dialectical materialism. In The German Ideology, Marx argues that the first "historical act" is the production of the means to satisfy the means of material life itself. This axiom is used to argue the idea that history and the production of culture separate out at some historical moment from the realm of nature itself. Common sense fim1ly endorses the belief that cultural origins occurred as a break with nature. However, such a belief is grounded in a metaphysical distinction between culture and nature. The distinction between culture and nature is part of a metaphysical structure common to Marxism, Christianity, and much of Western thought. It is an analytical distinction for which there is no empirical justification; the separation of nature from culture sets up an ontology the importance of which I can hardly begin to describe. Given the destructive results of the traditional belief that human culture thrives only at the expense of nature, it may well be that the belief in this separation will lead to increasing misery for our species, if not its demise-or to a natural death in the nature from which we have believed that we may sever our ties. Concern for ecology aside-only momentarily aside-I content myself here with noting that the logical distinction that separates nature and culture is tautological: Av -A, all is nature or non-nature.

Through this tautology, the relations of human beings and nature are severed. History can accordingly be viewed as the

metaphysical epic of production and the conquest of nature. Or, simply, man separates himself from animals by production. Nature becomes the agonistic opposite to men and production. As opposed to Hegel, Marx's history is not the tale of how the tale is told; rather, it is the tale of the necessary production of the tale. Or, as Marx further wrote in The German Ideology, his concept of history does not end by being resolved into Hegelian selfconsciousness: At each stage of history there is found a material result, a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation of individuals to Nature and to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessors, a mass of productive forces, capital, and circumstances, which is indeed modified by the new generation but which also prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definite development.1 There is something dynamic about Marx's vision of the accumulation of technique leading to the conquest of nature, but this grandiose vision is as metaphysical as Hegel's. For every statement in this definition of history is a proposition that is true essentially by definition. By definition there is, and always is, a totality, which is merely a verbal definition superimposed on the opposition of nature and society. Thus, any given social totality-a vacuous analytical notion-opposes what came before and what comes after. By definition, the agonistic unfolding of history is the dialectic of present and antecedent states. Metaphysical tautologies generate the great tale of production in which the representations of consciousness come, necessarily, after the production of necessities-for superfluities are defined logically and analytically as what are preceded by necessities. By the same logical move, the "means of production" must precede what it produces; and hence it "determines" what it produces. And, by logical identity the owners of the means of production are the producers of what is produced-beans and ideology.

I am suggesting in short that Marxist materialism, intending to demol - ish "idealism" in the philosophical sense, is as much grounded in metaphysics as is any idealist construct of mind that neo-Kantians, Hegelians, or belated romantics produced. The meaning of "metaphysics" is "beyond nature." Marxism is grounded in the tale of going beyond physis, or nature. And I think that the self-deceptive Marxist reliance on metaphysics is probably more harmful than helpful in finding some modes of thought that might al1ow us to find a new understanding of human ecology. Marxism is a worldview predicated upon tautologies that enable it to explain the totality of human culture-or that culture that exists by logical definition within the Marxist theoretical framework.

While of little pragmatic value, the emotional appeal of grasping the totality of what exists by definition is exhilarating. But it is highly questionable that a totality that exists only as a tautology has any function other than to serve as an intoxicant for intellectuals desirous of more power than they have.

Having a grasp on the cultural totality, Marxist theorists develop corollary tautologies in interesting logical moves that increase the illusion of control over "reality." In fact, the philosopher Herbert Marcuse's definition of that most honorific of concepts, "reality," can serve to launch us into modem Marxist theorizing: Reality, where man's essence is determined, is the totality of the relations of production. It is no mere "existing manifold of circumstances," but ratl1er a structure whose organization can be analyzed, and witllin which it is possible to distinguish between form and content, essence and appearance, the concealed and the obvious. Its content is the maintenance and reproduction of society as a whole-tlle actual process of production and rerroduction,

based on a given level of tlle productive forces and of technology.

Marxist "reality" sounds suspiciously like a novel here. It has a structure to be analyzed by the critic who can distinguish between form and content, its essence and its appearance, and between surface and hidden meaning---or manifest and latent content, as Freudians and Marxists like Marcuse might say. By definition, reality is a totality; hence it must reproduce society, for by definition a totality does everything. (This is not unlike Anselm's ontological argument: the perfection of the deity carries with it the necessity of existence, for by definition nonexistence is not an attribute of perfection.) Ethical imperatives aside, another appeal of Marxist theory is found in the way Marxist theory conflates "reality" and literature in such a way that a reading of one is a reading of the other.

The logic of identity produces equations, if not metaphors, in which literature is reality, which is literature. Or, in more sophisticated terms, literature maintains a "homology" with social ideology, a magic tautology according to which structure (of the social totality) is structure (of the literary work).

This putative logical identity underwrites the various mimetic theories of literature that Marxist theorists endorse. It might appear that the historical source of this mimetic view is Marx's own reading of all ideological productions as "reflections" of the economic infrastructure.

The classic passage in this regard is found in Marx's A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Here, he describes the relation of all ideological productions to their determining ground: In tlle social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations tllat are

indispensable and independent of tlleir will; tllcsc relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of tlleir material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes tlle economic structure of society-tlle real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines tlle general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not tlle consciousness of men tllat determines tlleir existence, but, on the contrary, tlleir social existence determines their consciousness. 3 1 I This assertion about consciousness is among the most quoted of all, and for good reason. Though drawing upon a traditional metaphysics of representation, Marx suggests an updated way of describing the ontology of the artwork. He makes of the artwork a reproduction of production, or a reflection to the second degree of a more primordial reality. In effect, Marx seems to repeat the traditional Platonic metaphysics describing art as imitation or mimesis, though with a different political slant from the one given to it by Plato in the Republic. As producers or reproducers of ideology, writers are allowed by Marx, unbeknownst to themselves, nonetheless to represent correctly the social totality. Marx would not have chased Balzac from the polis in spite of the French novelist's overtly reactionary ideology. for, in his novels, Balzac expressed the social contradictions that characterize the movement of history. Reality reveals itself through Balzac in spite of Balzac.

Marx and most Marxists after him describe a mimetic relation when they proclaim that social existence determines the "spiritual processes of life" -though in confronting the obvious fact of human autonomy, of creativity and spontaneity, later Marxists are at pains to grant some degree of freedom to intellectual life. But the basic relationship of

intellectual and creative life is one in which a more primordial domain determines a secondary domain. To pursue the analogy between the Marxist theory of artistic production and the Platonic view of mimesis, I recall that in the Republic Plato develops the view that the poets and painters imitate ideas found in the realm of eidos, or the realm of divine forms. Or, more exactly, they imitate imitations of these ideas found in the world. Poets are imitators to the third degree. This ontological distance between the reality of ideas and the artistic work is a weakness in Plato's eyes. Works are inferior to reality. Moreover, in offering a defective reproduction of ideas, poets don't know what they are talking about. And for this, Plato recommended the first political act that should accompany literary theory; he wanted to banish poets from the ideal republic.

Marxist theory reproduces much the same argument by effecting a series of definitions that, for all their implausibility, still have great currency in the university. According to Marxist theory, poets imitate ideology, understood as a mimetic series of representations of the worldview of the dominant class. Literature is an imitation of an imitation, or to point up the tautology that Marxists stipulate: literature is a representation; ideology is a representation; and so literature is ideology. And both are representations of the preexisting ontological ground, which is social existence and the means of production. With regard to the conclusion that poets should be banished from the republic, it seems that the Stalinist policy of censuring all but acceptable representations is inherent to a certain view of mimesis, for if mimesis is always ideology, it is always a presentation of distortions-and, once equipped with the truth, what theorist or political hack can countenance deviations from ontological plenitude? In any case, the Humpty Dumpty principle is most clearly at work in the

tautology that defines representation as the equivalent of ideology.

Armed with a tautology declaring reality to be a totality with a structure-Humpty Dumpty could not do better-Marxist theory proceeds to resurrect a mimetic theory of art and literature with the "totality" of the relations of production functioning like Plato's ontologically superior realm of ideas. But Marx also allowed, as do subsequent theorists, that writers can truly represent that totality. This seems to be contradictory: writers do and do not represent true reality, or A and -A. This contradiction springs from the nature of the tautological nature of A v -A. Theorists can assert either side of the tautology with equal plausibility once literature is defined by the unitary principle of representation. The tautology defines "true" art or bourgeois art in terms of the necessary definition that says art is true or it isn't. The permutations on this verbal play are complicated then by defining what is bourgeois and what isn't. Marx agreed with reactionary Balzac, so Balzac's art is "true"; or a modem Marxist like Lukas admired Thomas Mann, so that great bourgeois wrote true novels.

Reading Marx is an intellectual adventure in insight and metaphysical confusion. Even the skeptic is fascinated by Marx's alternating between utopian grandeur and a cold-blooded demystification that wants to subvert our cherished humanist beliefs in the autonomy of the rationally empowered self. But the tough stance is founded on metaphysical sleight of hand. Not only does Marxist theory confuse logical necessity with mere empirical existence, and argue from this historical necessity to establish a contradictory metaphysical view of representation, there are other misleading aesthetic categories that Marxist theory relies upon.

And in them one finds the same incapacity to separate out logical definitions and pragmatic use. Form and content can illustrate this point.

Working with essentially Aristotelian distinctions, Marxists of various persuasions make a great effort to show that literary mimesis can be understood by variously emphasizing form or content. The concepts of form and content are again logical distinctions; but it is dubious that they can be shown to have more than a kind of conceptual necessity. (Much to the point here are Heidegger's comments in "On the Origins of the Work of Art" to the effect that one always does violence to a work of art when 1 I one tries to tear it asunder with metaphysical concepts like form and content.) Form and content belong to a Greek ontology of substance in which ousia is imprinted with some form belonging to a metaphysical realm of ideas. I suppose it is not surprising that Marxist theory resurrect this ontology. With their concept of art as imitation, Marxist theories are tied to the mimetic theory that finds its origins in this same ontology.

Georg Lukas, the Hungarian thinker, is probably the single most important modern Marxist literary theorist (though there are other, more important revisionists of Marxist theory). In his work, the classical ontoJogy of the artwork is cJearly spelled out. Lukas is, moreover, an emblematically unhappy thinker for the twentieth century, for his conversion from Hegelian philosophy to Marxism meant that this essentially humanist thinker, living in Eastern Europe, had to endure Stalinism for much of his life. At the end of his life, in essays collected in Writer and Critic, we find him in the post-Stalinist era attempting to develop a Marxist theory capable of sustaining a humanist Marxist tradition whiJe rejecting both Stalinism and the European modernist movement that he could not abide. (Empirical confirmation was not a strong point for Lukas, who could accept neither

Kafka nor Beckett as major writers.) What Lukas demonstrates in his reliance on classical ontology, and what is characteristic of Marxism in general, is the conceptual linkage that transforms all esthetic questions into political questions by a series of definitions. Lukas claims that all formal problems in literature are social problems. The primacy of the political is, from his standpoint, a logical conclusion if we accept Marxist definitions of form. These say that a literary work is defined as form and content. In a priori terms, form and content are defined as two sides of the same thing. If all literary works are mimetic representations of social conditions, or relations of production, then by definition it follows that all formal aspects are also mimetic embodiments of the underlying state of "reality" to which the work gives mimetic expression. So form equals content. This is an analytical statement that can have meaning only in the context of an ontology based on classical metaphysics and, when recycled as political fare, is not especially meaningful for most of us.

Lukas was quite conscious of the tradition in which he was working.

He also knew what unlikely practical results might come from equating form with content: Long ago Aristotle df1fined the artist's task when he declared even in verse Herodotus would be an historian and not a poet since a poet is concerned not with what has actually happened but with what is possible. The possible, con - sidercd both positively and negatively, is the maximally possible .... Literary forms develop from the theoretical and practical exploration of these concrete maximal potentialities to the ultimate. Not in the sense of mere fonnal techniques, for the transformation of a history or chronicle into verse might actu - ally result in unprecedented innovations in prosody without producing true literature, but in the sense of true form, in the sense of

the genuine creation of form, in the sense of the integration of the what of the social and historical question with the how of the formal artistic response. Of the unity of content and fonn Hegel said: "Content is nothing but the transformation of form into content, and form is nothing but the transformation of content into form." That is why the genuine categories of literary forms are not simply literary in essence. They are fonns of life especially adapted to the articulation of great alternatives in a practical and effective manner and to the exposition of the maximal inner potentialities of forces and counterforces. 4 The skeptic might ask what form is and request a demonstration that formal questions have import for social potentialities. The answer to skeptical questions is anticipated by the definition that only "true" or "genuine" categories of form are at stake. Any counterexample to a Marxist demonstration can be ruled out of order by defining it as a false or not-genuine example. By semantic fiat, genuine literary forms are expressions of social questions. This is again an example of argument by definition, which is to say that it is not argument but demonstration by decree.

Lukas equivocates in the grounds for his demonstration. He suggests that literary forms are "forms of life" that have been "adapted" to the articulation of alternatives. The soup9on of biology, a touch of Darwinism, is simply embellishment, to suggest that Marxist theory overlaps science. There is no substantive demonstration as to how one might consider literature from an adaptive point of view, though that would be an interesting investigation. Darwin remains a taunting example for Marxists: Engels claimed Kapital would do for economics what Origin of Species did for biology. But the suggestion adds a mere patina of science to what is otherwise a reprise of metaphysical notions, mixed-up in a not very original cocktail, whose basic

message is that literature, if it is "true" literature, deals mimetically with Lukas's politics.

Compared with more recent Marxist thinkers who try to update Marx with the latest Parisian models of textuality, Lukas retains that charm that orthodox common sense always has. Especially since representation and the subject have become taboo concepts for poststructuralist theory, the amateur of the demode finds it endearing to be able to tum to a thinker who, until his death in 1971, still defended tlle subject-object dichotomy 1 I as the basis for epistemology. Lukas believed that the artist, much like the scientist, faces a real objective world that sends a picture to the observing subject. There is some difference between the two ways of knowing. For the task of the scientist is to observe the world and organize systematic presentations of the laws of the objective world. But the "artistic subject," in accordance with "dialectical thought," must reflect the contradictions found in social reality: The artistic reflection of reality rests on the same contradiction as any other reflection of reality. What is specific to it is that it pursues another resolution of these contradictions than science. [...] The goal of all great art is to provide a picture of reality in which the contradiction between appearance and reality, the particular and the general, the immediate and the conceptual, etc., is so resolved that the two converge into a spontaneous integrity in the direct impression of the work of art and provide a sense of an inseparable integrity. (34) In this example of dialectical thinking, the description of the literary work is generated by a series of metaphysical oppositions that in no way need to taken as "contradictions"- except by definition. These contradictions are fabricated tautologies. The particular does not stand in a relation of contradiction to the general, nor is there any sense in which the immediate and the conceptual are in contradiction, except from that peculiar Marxist perspective that so defines

them. From this perspective, A is always ready to become -A; and the basic either/or tautology can be imposed on every conceptual couple in order to define a "dialectic." And so everything that is can be, by definition, in contradiction with itself.

One may, with Humpty Dumpty, define concepts as one wants, but it is not clear, as Humpty Dumpty would have it, that this gives one mastery over them.

The mimetic theory of art propounded by Marxists shares certain features with other cultural movements of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lukas recalls the Wittgenstein who tried to work out the contradictions of language theory in the Tractatus, probably the last major work of philosophy to present a representational theory of language. Wittgenstein wanted language to picture the exact states of affairs that maintain in the world. The problem is that nobody could ever point out---or define-what would be a "state of affairs" in the world of which an atomic proposition would be a picture. In a comparable way, the mimetic theory of virtuous representation that Lukas and other Marxists have presented is a kind of exhortation to language veiled as a tautology: Language, picture the world as our political theory says it is! 48 THE POWER OF TAUTOI.OGY In the Tractatus, Wittgenstein could not point out an example of what can be pictured in language; nor can one find in a Marxist tome those contradictions that should be pictured in language. A contradiction cannot be pictured-however close Magritte or Escher may at times come to that feat. A contradiction is a purely grammatical or logical relation. Not even the plot of War and Peace can mirror a contradiction, though Lukas found Tolstoy's plot to be the locus of truth (51).

Many contemporary Marxists have eschewed the theory of the pictorial or mirroring relation of literature and "reality," though mimesis returns in these more recent works through the back door. Perhaps the most influential thinker in this regard has been the French philosopher Louis Althusser, whose rereading of Marx in the 1960s turned the German metaphysician of radical economics into a French structuralist.

Or so it has often been charged. The accusation seems convincing.

Working within the stifling orthodoxy of the French Communist Party, Althusser sought to bring Marx up to date by interpreting him in the light of modern philosophy of science, especially that epistemology derived from Bachelard and from structural linguistics. Taking from Bachelard the notion that all sciences establish themselves by making a break-a coupure-with the scientific models that precede them, Althusser made Marx a contemporary of Thomas Kuhn. Accordingly, Marxist science is a new theoretical model that represents an epistemological break with the past. This is not an especially Marxist way of viewing the evolution of Marx, nor is the theory of culture that Althusser derives from Marx.

According to this theory, Marxism is not a historicism, nor does Marxist philosophy find a telos in history. Eschatology has no place in Althusser' s reading of Marxism as a synchronic reading of the unfolding of diachrony or the series of states that go to make up the past. Much of my critique of structuralism is pertinent here, and I refer the reader to it without further commentary, except to note that the notion of epistemological break is a questionable generalization for all sciences and seems an absurdity when read into Marx.

Taking Marx to be a scientist, Althusser says that Marx's achievement is to have created a new scientific object: "Knowledge working on its 'object' does not work on the real object, but on its own raw material which constitutes, in the rigorous sense of the terms, its 'object' which is, beginning with the most rudimentary forms of knowledge, distinct from the real object. "5 This is a radical rereading of Marx, one that separates the scientific model from the real and that in effect grants the model precedence over whatever reality might be accounted for by the model.

This is not implausible in terms of contemporary scientific epistemology.

But it seems rather remote from Marx.

I I History read from this perspective seems absent as history, as a past, for history can only be found as some cause working to shape society in the present moment. History is defined thus as absence and can only be elicited from its textual effects in the present moment. And these textual effects can be made accessible only by the theoretical model. The American Marxist Frederic Jameson provides a sympathetic interpretation of this presence of absence by calling upon psychoanalysis: What Althusser' s own insistence on history as an absent cause makes clear, but what is missing from the fonnula as it is canonically worded, is that he does not at all draw the fashionable conclusion that because history is a text.

the "referent" does not exist. We would therefore propose the following revised formulation: that history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily

passes f!1rough its prior tcxtualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.

Jameson makes explicit here what is implicit in Althusser: the absent real is something like the unconscious in psychoanalysis (and Althusser does seem to have in mind the psychoanalytic theories of his friend Jacques Lacan). This is all rather seductive, though it is a seduction worked again by a series of tautologies. The reasoning draws upon tautologies that define history as writing and writing as referential; and, in the supposed absence of a conscious referent, the theorist declares by definition that history is an unconscious referent-Le., the ultimate referent escapes our grasp, though by definition we know that history as the totality of reference must exist. For, by fiat there must be some totality of things that constitutes history. A is to be preferred to -A, for what would we do with a history that wasn't a totality of what is, i.e., history that is not history? The tautological chain goes on to propose a series of definitions that equate history and writing, with writing as either referential or nonreferential; and with the definition of writing as referential comes the logical alternative that the referent is either conscious or not.

Jameson can read Althusser in such a way that this epistemological legerdemain remains more or less true to Marxist orthodoxy, which is to say that the means of production is still defined as the ultimate referent of all texts: If therefore one wishes Lo characterize Althusser's Marxism as a structuralism, one must complete the characterization with the essential proviso that it is a structuralism for which only one structure exists: namely the mode of production itself, or the synchronic system of social relations as a whole. This is the sense in which this "structure" is an absent cause, since it is nowhere empirically present as an element, it is not a part of the

whole or one of the levels, but rather the entire system of relationships among those levels. (36) Since by definition the totality exists, ergo there can only be one of them.

Parmenides' monism lives on. Surprisingly, however, Althusser's mode of production also appears to resemble the linguistic system of any natu - ral language such as it is described by structural linguists: a system that is actualized whenever any speaker uses the language in an individual utterance, but which remains forever beyond our grasp in its totalityexcept as a necessary hypothesis to explain how individual speakers actualize a system that they all understand. This circular description of the operation of language is not necessarily the best way to describe how language functions, for it presupposes the existence of a total system whose existence is proved by the fact that we presuppose it. Transposed to the domain of social reality in its totality, it is not clear that there is any justification for this circular procedure that presupposes some total social system. This cumbersome transfer of a linguistic model to explain social reality leaves intact the ultimate referent of which all literature is a representation: the mode of production. And mimesis lives on.

Contemporary mimesis can take on strange shapes. The literary text can cease being an ordered representation of ideology present to itself, but, as Althusser's disciple Pierre Macherey develops it, rather the contrary. Total system becomes total disorder: The concealed order of the work is thus less significant than its real determinate disorder (its disarray). The order which it professes is merely an imagined order, projected onto disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth. It is no longer a question of defects but of indispensable informers. This distance which

separates the work from the ideology which it transfonns is rediscovered in the very letter of the work: it is fissured, unmade even in its making. A new kind of necessity can be defined: by an absence, by a lack. The disorder that permeates the work is related to the disorder of ideology (which cannot be organized as a system). The work derives its form from this incompleteness which enables us to identify the active presence of a conflict at its borders.7 This rather remarkable passage might suggest that Humpty Dumpty has fallen off the wall. If we had been dealing with mathematical equations, I suppose this passage would give the impression that all that had been positive until the present moment had suddenly been assigned negative values. We are still in the realm of tautologies, of statements declared 1 I troe by necessary definition, though -A is now A and vice versa. The mimetic relations maintain, though affected by the sign of fragmentation and negativity. It is as if original sin were at work here: the original negation of being-sin-works, at a distance, to maintain the material disorder for which it is responsible even when one cannot directly see it at work. Some might see here an analogy with the unconscious as described by psychoanalysis, but it seems to me that Macherey's structuralism is more theological. inquisitorial, in its capacity to find the negative principle of the Fall at work in the most deceitful ways.

The real has escaped contemporary Marxist theory, though by definition it must exist as history. All that seems left to it are the shadowy logical operations of totalization: the totality of whatever has been is history; and history is that totality of whatever has been. Faced with the demand to produce history, Marxist theory, become theology, now seems forever condemned to locate it in some absent ontological realm, like Macherey; or, reacting to Macherey, one can place it, as does the prolific English Marxist Terry Eagleton, in a slippery dialectical realm that exists by

perpetually annulling itself. It seems appropriate that a compatriot of Lewis Carroll should pen the following definition of the real: The real is by necessity empirically imperceptible, concealing itself in Lhe phenomenal categories (commodity, wage-relation, exchange-value and so on) it offers spontaneously for inspection. Ideology, rather, so produces and constructs the real as to cast the shadow of its absence over the perception of its presence constituted by its absences, and vice versa. 8 We have reached in Eagleton a nadir in stipulated tautologies, for by strange necessity the real is defined as forever beyond our grasp. If so, why speak about it? Marxist theorists, for all their disbelief in our capacity to see the real, or to know it, nonetheless write a great deal about it. The "real" is of course a term that has no meaning unless defined by a context-and usually serves as a term of positive evaluation against terms that are somehow inferior. In recent Marxist theory, the real is usually A as opposed to -A. But the contrary is possible, and I leave it to the reader to figure out where reality and its negation figure in Eagleton's analysis.

We have reached the limits of rationality when Marxist theorists purport to know the real that by principle is unknowable. It is worth stressing the strong irrationalist streak in contemporary Marxist thinkers, for their irrationality shows up in many contexts in which Marxist theory might not seem directly at issue. Consider the following attack on reason, appended to one of Eaglcton's tomes, in which a disciple, M. A. R.

Habib, inveighs against the coercive nature of the Jaws of identity. In their coercive function, the laws of identity serve bourgeois ideology.

Whether codified by Aristotle or formulated by the EnlightenmentEagleton and his disciple haven't got around

to agreeing on their historical facts-the laws of identity force us to accept the following rule of bourgeois ideology: "An entity is what it is precisely because it is not anything else."9 It is hard to quarrel with such logic, though the bourgeois nature of this tautology is difficult to understand. However, given the inflation of the concept of "difference" in contemporary literary theory, it is perhaps not surprising that a theorist should attack the political nature of the identity that language might conspire to impose on the defenseless object: Its identity is thus born in the process of dirempting its relations with other similarly "identified" things in the world, a process which thereby denies ontical status to those relations, treating them as somehow external to the entities related. This suppression of relations and relegation of them to a contingent status ... can serve a political and ideological function. For example, the identity of an object (which could be simply a physical entity or something as complex as a system of law or religion) which is in fact historically specific could be passed off as an eternal or natural identity. (10) The rational laws of identity apparently enact anomie by "dirempting" or separating objects from each other and destroying the relationships that unite them. It would hardly be worth taking note of this rather pathetic confusion of semantics and sociology were it not so prevalent. Failing to frame their theories in some way that makes proviso for verification, these theorists indulge in empty semantic jousting. Marx could make the charge, for example in The Communist Manifesto, that the victorious capitalist class had severed all traditional human associations. For Marx, there was an empirical content to this accusation that he sought to document. But it seems to be merely a bizarre defense of defective tautological thinking when enraged Marxists make this charge against logical laws. The proposition that A is A says nothing about the relations A may entertain in the world. This conceptual confusion is a sign of the irrationalism to which Marxist

theory has been reduced by the history of which it supposedly discovered the inexorable workings. Historically, Marx was probably wrong on most counts, but at least he and Engels were capable of rich empirical analyses of historical contexts. Today, the attack on rationality seems the final strategy of thinkers trying to exercise their will to power in that one area in which they hope to enjoy a degree 1 I of success: playing with or railing against logical identities. Theorists who live in the realm of tautologies seem to lose sight eventually of the fact that they are only dealing with words. And so, shortly before his death, a major theorist, Roland Barthes, could decry language as fascistic in its very nature, since it imposes meanings upon us. Barthes's Marxist side transformed him, too, into another leftwing Humpty Dumpty who thought that an assault on language might transform ideological and social conditions.

In the introduction, I noted that the boundary between empirical propositions and a priori positions is not clear. It can change and, in logical terms, vary as propositions are used in different ways. It seems to me that if, in the nineteenth-century context, some of Marx's propositions had empirical plausibility, in the late twentieth century they have been transformed by his disciples into a priori propositions that prop up an essentially moralizing worldview. The proposition that literature is an expression or reflection of ideology is a good example. It is probably empirically true that various literary works have at different historical times given expression or embodied different worldviews that could be defined as ideology. One reads the worldview of the dominant class in Rome through Horace or Virgil-and yet one reads it quite differently in each poet. But this fact does not mean that all literature expresses ideology in the same sense. How do you define the ideology that Sappho expresses? Or Li Po? Or Colette? The empirically valid insight that Marx had about the willed or unconscious

blindness of the nineteenth-century capitalist class to its ethical contradictions remains historically true-as expressed in this class's approving Dickens's novels while operating sweat shops with child labor. This insight does not translate into an analytical statement. Marxist literary theory makes this insight into a definition of literature, however, when Marxism identifies every literary work with representation and then defines representation as either true or ideological-or, in the case of later theorists, calls all representation a form of ideology. This translation of empirical observation into an a priori proposition shows a blindness to the real historical conditions of literature and the multiple contexts of its production. There is nothing less historical than much of the theorizing about literature that claims to be Marxist.

There is another reason for modern Marxism's ahistorical reliance on a priori categories like totality, ideology, and reflection. A fundamental Marxist desire, after Marx, is to find a "meaning" to history. "Meaning" means finding homogeneities in history that the theorist in thirst of metaphysical solace can transform into a structure of intelligibility. This rewriting of history produces a secular form of theodicy and informs the ideology of contemporary Marxism, in literary studies in the universities, though scarcely anywhere else. Simply put, history must have a meaning that gives moral significance to everything that happens. A tautology is at work here, too, for the proposition, perhaps meaningless in itself, can be stated that history has or does not have a meaning: A or -A. Without a theological framework, however, I cannot conceive what it means to say that history must have a meaning. Marxism as theology is what underlies Fredric Jameson's declaration of the necessity of Marxism. He begins The Political Unconscious: I will argue here the priority of a Marxian interpretative framework in terms of semantic richness. Marxism cannot today be defended as a mere

substitute for such other methods [the ethical, the psychoanalytic, the semiotic, the theological, etc.], which would then triumphalistically be consigned to the ashcan of history; the authority of such methods springs from their faithful consonance with this or that local law of a fragmented social life, this or that subsystem of a complex and mushrooming cultural superstructure. In the spirit of a more authentic dialectical tradition, Marxism is here conceived as that "untranscendable horizon" that subsumes such apparently antagonistic or incommensurable critical operations, assigning them an undoubted sectoral validity within itself, and thus at once canceling and preserving them. (10) Jameson's Hegelian brio allows him to pull everything into the march of history so that everything has meaning; and meaning is everything.

Nothing gets lost in the developing totality that, as we have seen, must exist-since everything that is, is. And in it all parts must find their role in the total meaning orchestrated by Marxist eschatology.

Titis eclecticism is not simply to be interpreted as a pluralistic view of history's meaning, for all is subordinated to the developing totality. For most Marxists, meaning is really eschatology: it is derived from looking toward the end of history in the final triumph of the proletariat, or of some universal class for which the theorist is a spokesperson. This is a theological notion of meaning, and like most theological notions it is not generous. The meaning of history derives from the victory of good over evil, with the final resolution of class warfare: one must not forget the Marxist corollary axiom that class warfare is defined as the motor of history.

An analysis of the theological nature of this belief would take us far.

However, my subject matter has been here to point up the way certain tautologies function in the formation of that worldview in which Marxist literary theory is grounded. I would conclude on this note if Marxist attitudes were not significantly responsible for the creation of an attitude 1 I that risks undermining our contemporary intellectual climate and, finally, the functioning of civil society. With its theological sense of rectitude, Marxism has little use for tolerance. Many, if not most, Marxists are quite willing to argue against tolerance in the name of superior moral insight-and of course the "meaning" of history. And tolerance is a major issue in theory, for tolerance is the necessary precondition for all discourse. Liberalism argues that tolerance is much like a logical necessity, an a priori condition for discourse, that finds limits only when it encounters intolerance. Logically and pragmatically, tolerance cannot tolerate intolerance, but it is sometimes difficult to draw the line limiting the expression of intolerance. Skinheads setting fire to my office have crossed the line. But have students done so when they put a poster on their door that offends some minority group? I doubt it, though context is everything. Tolerance means tolerance of opinions that offend. For Marxists and many inspired by Marxist tautologies, intolerance can be a virtue, since in principle they view tolerance as an error. Such is the sense of a remark by a Marxist like Eagleton who admits that he can "see nothing wrong with closure and exclusion per se."lO Marxist theory is willing to argue that tolerance is a repressive bourgeois notion. And in so doing, Marxist thought shows itself to be totalitarian by nature. As Camus argued in The Rebel, Stalinism was probably not an accident. It was a logical expression of the intolerance championed by those who know the truth.

This point must be emphasized: tolerance is the a priori condition of the pursuit of truth. However, when one defines,

as Marcuse did in A Critique of Pure Tolerance, the telos of tolerance as truth, I suppose- one no longer needs tolerance once one has the truth. This is a, if not the, crucial difference between liberalism and Marxist thought. And so Marcuse demonstrated his incapacity to understand liberal democracy by allowing that tolerance could only be tolerated as a precondition of finding the way to freedom: However, this tolerance cannot be indiscriminate and equal with respect to the contents of expression, neither in word nor in deed; it cannot protect false words and wrong deeds which demonstrate that they contradict and counteract the possibilities of liberation. Such indiscriminate tolerance is justified in harmless debates .... But society cannot be indiscriminate where the pacification of existence, where freedom and happiness themselves are at stake: here, certain things cannot be said, certain ideas cannot be expressed, certain policies cannot be proposed, certain behavior cannot be permitted without making tolerance an instrument for the continuation of servitude. 11 No leader of the American religious right could put it better-though Marcuse's Marxist cant would be one of the first things the religious right would censor.

Eagleton's or Marcuse's attack on tolerance points up the logical contradiction involved in denying tolerance. Most of what we find obnoxious about the idea of being "politically correct" comes from the sense that such rectitude implies intolerance of other viewpoints. One can certainly believe that sexism, racism, and economic exploitation are wrong and argue the point-usually victoriously, I would hope. But a victory of the groundswell of intolerance that is accompanying the fight to change public ideology and private values would be the defeat of the very goals that the university and society at large have a commitment to defend. It is only my personal intuition, but one that I could easily document, that Marxist certitudes about the necessity

of change are also partly responsible for the growing lack of tolerance that we have seen in society in the past few years. American society needs great changes, to be sure, but they will not be accomplished by fiat from above or by dictates of the vanguard of the proletariat or the politically correct.

Freudian Theories

After the "totalizing" thought of Marxist theory, it is refreshing to turn to Freud's intellectual candor. As we shall see, there is a totalizing side to Freud's thought that is no less ambitious than Marx's when it comes to offering a theory of human culture. However, we should salute in Freud one of the great liberators of the modern mind insofar as his thought leads to a greater tolerance for the varieties of impulse that may underlie our conscious desires. Marx, too, was a salutary demystifier in the nineteenth century insofar as he forced the bourgeoisie to confront its hypocrisy in the creation of an ideology that allowed a rapacious capitalist class to exploit misery with no shame. With a greater sense of human limits, Freud also laid bare the hypocrisy of our often pathological attempts to mask our sexuality. In the hands of his followers, Freud's thought has run the same risks as Marx's theory. The tautological side of psychoanalytic theory has become the basis for a theoretical orthodoxy that seems to live on more by dint of repetition than by active exploration of the psyche. A Freudian world view has come into existence, much like a Marxist one. Unfortunately, Freud's final contribution to knowledge has been the founding of schools of Freudian thought and not an active science.

There is little point here to repeat the many critiques of the scientific validity of psychoanalysis. Whether psychoanalysis can be considered a science depends on the criteria used to

define scientific rigor; and by virtually all standards, psychoanalysis is lacking in rigor. But the question is still open, and one can defend psychoanalysis as a practice, if not a science. However, psychoanalysis as a medical discipline is not directly our concern. We shall put books on the couch, not living neurotics. Our concern is that aspect of Freud's work that has allowed and indeed encouraged the elaboration of a theory that purports to explain literature.

57 As a reading of Freud's own theoretical work makes clear, however, what constitutes Freudian explanation of literature varies greatly. There are at least two or three theories of literature at work in Freud's own writings, and these theories occupy center stage in this chapter. Unlike Marx, who never developed more than a general theory of the production of consciousness, Freud was quite interested in literary questions. It can be argued that he suffered an inferiority complex vis-a-vis certain writers- Goethe or Nietzsche, for example-writers who supposedly anticipated Freud's own "discoveries." (Following Freud's lead, Freudians often use the word "discovery" in such a way as to suggest that Freud's conceptual entities enjoy today an empirical status not unlike that of microbes or quasars.) Moreover, the question of a Freudian theory of literature is interestingly complicated by the way Freud drew upon literature to theorize his discoveries, such as the Oedipal complex or the rhetorical exegesis of the "meaning" of dreams. Literature supplies the Freudian with theoretical concepts, and these concepts derived from literature are used in turn to explain the nature of literary works.

This reciprocity shows that Freud's theories of literature are an extension of his general theory of how the human psyche functions, and in turn this theory is largely a literary construct, or at least a theory based on literary structures such as allegory and poetic figures. According to the theory,

some aspect of the human psyche is always the ultimate referent of a literary text. Freudian theory, like Marxist theory, explains literature in terms of an ultimate signified or referent, which is also the cause of the representation. Representation is again at the heart of the theory. A conceptual circularity underlies the Freudian theory of mimesis, and it functions much like what we have seen in the Marxist worldview. For Marxism, the infrastructure gives rise to a superstructure that in turn grants the infrastructure representation, often in veiled form, as literature and other ideological products. According to Freudian theory, literature is produced by unconscious forces, so that literature represents to consciousness some aspect of the unconscious psyche-in veiled forms of which consciousness is not aware. But in Freudian theory, the psyche is also a literary construct that is interpreted in literary terms. Essentially, the Freudian psyche is an allegorical construct.

Literature provides the allegorical concepts that describe the psyche, which in turn gives rise to literature. Believers in Freudian discoveries may argue that this circularity is not necessarily tautological. To the skeptic, it certainly appears to be a veiled tautology, for the theory identifies psychic space with the space of literature, which allows for the definition of literature as a form of psychic space. And each is thus defined in terms of the other.

2 I Freudian Theories 59 How does literature furnish the definition of the psyche? It does so in several ways. Freud conceived the psyche as an agonistic space in which dramatic characters known as the id, the ego, and the superego confront each other and work out the drama of their antagonisms. This allegorical trinity may somewhat recall a comparable allegory Plato used to describe the soul. However, this allegorical trio should not obscure the fact that Freud, who used the tragic character Oedipus to define

developmental psychology, was usually a binary thinker. Psychic dramas are usually defined and redefined as allegories working with dichotomous oppositions.

These oppositions form positive and negative poles of the tautologies that underwrite the allegories of Freudian theory. Throughout much of Freud's career, the basic opposition was furnished by the polarity of the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Human drives or impulses all aim, by definition, at gratification. Opposing gratification-or the realization of the pleasure principle-are the demands of the reality principle that by definition hinders the spontaneous gratification of our untrammeled desire. That our psyche is structured by the basic opposition of desire and reality has a kind of empirical plausibility about itthough there is probably no way that one could prove or disprove that such a thesis adequately describes psychic life. The agonistic relation of the pleasure principle and the reality principle is in effect a definition of the way one defines psychic phenomena. The relation functions in fact as an exhaustive a priori binary opposition: A or -A, desire or opposition to desire, libido or reality-reality understood variously as social norms and physical necessity. All psychic life aims at gratification, or, by corollary definition, delay of gratification when that delay is imposed by necessity.

"Reality" in most of Freud's examples is a negation, though one can of course conceive of an occasional satisfied desire. In our usual neurotic state, reality is defined as what is dictated by bodily conservation, or laws, physical and social, that stand in the way of our limitless libido and our boundless ego.

This dichotomy of desire and reality is tautologically a unitary principle that generates Freud's allegories. All drives aim at gratification, and the reality principle is simply the

principle that imposes cunning upon the pleasure principle. It sets up the rules one must obey, by necessity, to obtain pleasure. To offer the kind of example Freud had in mind, if upon listening to the pleasure principle, one were simply to rape the first object of desire that crosses one's path, one would go to jail, and there would be no more gratification. So one obeys the laws-and respects the power that enforces them-in order to enjoy the more limited gratifications that may be had within the confines of the real, which means that one respects the limits that the exterior world imposes upon gratification so that gratification can ultimately maximize itself.

Freud's penchant for binary oppositions led him in his later theorizing to oppose the pleasure principle or the libido-erotic desires-to the death instinct. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), the overarching allegory sets eros against thanatos, love against death, or preservation against dissolution. Freud mixes biology with allegorical figures in setting forth this allegorical design, or at least casts a patina of biological reasoning upon the dramatic design: It is all the more necessary for us to lay stress upon the libidinal character of the self-preservation instincts now that we are venturing upon the further step of recognizing the sexual instinct as Eros, the preserver of all things, and of deriving the narcissistic libido of the ego from the stores of libido by means of which the cells of the soma are attached to one another. But we now find ourselves faced by another question. If the self-preservation instincts too are of a libidinal nature, are there perhaps no other instincts whatever but the libidinal ones? I With hesitancy----or coyness-Freud reduces all instincts to characters in a libidinal allegory. The dramas of psychic life are therefore fueled by what Freud here calls a dualism between death instincts and life instincts, or the "Eros of the poets and philosophers which hold all living things together" (88). This

is a dualism that is defined in positive and negative terms opposing the totality of all living things to their negation. The analytical formulation again corresponds to the basic tautology that allows one to speak of a unitary principle of explanation embodied in all life forms.

It is important to see that Freud's reality principle and pleasure principle, or the later life instincts and death instincts, are essentially a single explanatory principle that has an a priori purchase on all psychic phenomena. Their scope is by definition all encompassing. And this tautological grasp of the psychic world explains, by definition, the power of the Freudian conceptual model: by definition, nothing in our psychic life can ever escape it. Moreover, Freud's gift for finding associations between the most disparate phenomena-all illustrating his unitary principle-made him a powerful exegete and theorist of culture. In Totem and Taboo, for example, he found a commonality between neurotic compulsions of civilized people and the taboos of so-called primitive people. (Freud's willingness to look at the "primitives" as representatives of humanity's childhood shows that he was a rather primitive anthropologist.) By "harmonizing" disparate cultural phenomena in terms of the pleasure principle, Freud demonstrates 21 Freudian Theories 61 commonalities between the civilized neurotic and primitive cultures: the substitution of a neurotic symptom for a repressed desire in "civilized men" follows the same psychic principle that explains how a taboo allows an unconscious displacement of a repressed desire for an entire primitive ethnic group.

Freud claims that pleasure wins out in a taboo, exactly as in a neurosis, through "substitutive actions which recompense the impulse for what has been forbidden. "2 To go from a theory of taboo to a theory of literature, we need only follow the conceptual linkage derived from this substitution theory.

First, however, Freud's epistemological operation is of interest. Working by analogy, using the unifying principle of desire, Freud produces an explanation of a psychic effect for which there is no apparent rational explanation: the strength of taboo. Freudian theory offers an explanation by reproducing or projecting the structure of the explanatory model onto the phenomenon to be explained. And this powerful circularity-which is often very persuasive-counts finally as the criterion for explanation. With a seamless circularity, Freud found manifestations of his unitary principal in proposing some of the most outlandish explanations of our cultural life. Primal hordes, Oedipal desires, castration complexes, these became part of our cultural inheritance. Moderns no longer need envy the poetic powers of the medieval mind that could populate its vocabulary with substances and attributes, or unicorns and fairies.

For purposes of developing a theory of literature, it is essential to have in hand the trinitarian agencies that Freud described as composing our psychic unity---0r lack thereof, since the agonistic allegories of Freudian psychic life allow for little unity. At war with each other in the psyche are the id, the ego, and the superego, to use the pretentious Latin that passes for a translation of Freud's "Es," "Ich," and "Uberich"-It, I, and Over-I. Much of Freud's power comes from the everyday language he uses, and he has been badly served by the attempt to "medicalize" his German with Latinisms and neologisms. The human child is born essentially as a selfish bundle of libidinal impulses, emanating from the id, or that "it" that defies language and any easy definition. The id is instinct and is found in the realm of the unconscious. The id is the source of the "raw material" that, under the pressure from reality and culture-if that is a viable distinction-will develop into the conscious ego that in turn will find itself endowed with a superego, or

the moral voice embodying the values and prohibitions of family and culture. The evolution of the ego is central to Freud's elaboration of an allegory describing the psyche, as is clear in his final formulation of his psychic allegory: Under the influence of the real external world around us, one portion of the id has undergone a special development. From what was originally a cortical layer, equipped with the organs for receiving stimuli and with arrangements for acting as a protective shield against stimuli, a special organization has arisen which henceforward acts as an intermediary between the id and the external world. To this region of our mind we have given the name of ego .3 Freud speaks of his characters, the id and the ego, as spatialized agencies, though, in his attempt to speak as a natural scientist, he follows up his metaphors by inventing imaginary entities such as a cortical layer of mind. This kind of invention points up a recurrent problem in psychoanalytic models. Psychoanalysis has little immediately in common with biology, for the agencies of the psyche cannot be found in the empirical world. Perhaps one might argue the converse: they arc definitions allowing us to understand the position of the empirical world with regard to the psyche. The empirical world is there, so by definition there must be consciousness for it. This is not an argument that I care to pursue here, however. Suffice it to say that cortical layers of the mind are Freudian metaphors at their least useful, and they indicate how purely verbal entities can quickly populate our psychic landscapes.

The allegorical trinity orchestrates the universal principle of desire.

The id rages with desire, the ego represses those desires that are incompatible with reality, and the superego makes demands upon the ego in the names of cultural values that are largely acquired through the family. Seen in this light,

Freud's trinity is actually another dualism, since the ego--conscious and preconscious--exists essentially to service the demands of the id. The nature of this binary allegory is clear in a speculative work like Beyond the Pleasure Principle: There is no doubt that the resistance of the conscious and unconscious ego operates under the sway of the pleasure principle: it seeks to avoid the unpleasure which would be produced by the liberation of the repressed. Our efforts, on the other hand, are directed towards procuring the toleration of that unpleasure by an appeal to the reality principle. (41) The service role of the ego is clearer in German: "Es ist kein Zweifel, dass der Widerstand des bewussten und vorbewussten Iches im Dienstc des Lustprinzips steht, er will je die Unlust ersparen, die durch das Frei - werden des Verdrangten erregt wtirde."4 Resistance stands in the service of the pleasure principle, and all psychic striving, in Freud's usual legal tenninology, is an attempt to reduce pain by appealing to the court of the reality principle. The psyche is ultimately determined again by the positive and negative polarity of gratification and nongratification-for 2 I Freudian Theories 63 the superego, like a prosecuting attorney, imposes the demands of culture asking for the suppression of desire.

In the course of the development of the self, Freud theorizes a number of stages, all of which are determined by permutations of the principle of desire and nondesire, as we can conveniently call the unified tautology at work here. First, each baby finds its gratification on the breast of its mother, and so life begins with nearly total success in the pursuit of the pleasure principle. Reality intervenes to create the drama of various delayed gratifications and repressions that bring us to that state of permanent dissatisfaction and neurosis known as maturity. From oral gratification as children we move to sadistic-anal gratification and then to the phallic stage, where the drama of gender identity

begins. Like Oedipus of Greek tragedy, every boy desires to continue to possess his mother but imagines he may be castrated by his father for these forbidden desires-and upon seeing that the mother has no phallus, he believes she is castrated. And so the boy traumatically completes the Oedipal stage by entering sexual latency. The girl child also experiences trauma, though Freud's theorizing about female development never achieved the cogency of the Oedipal drama he borrowed for the male. A girl also suffers a trauma because she thinks she has already undergone castration, and this misperception is in turn compounded by penis envy: she has only a clitoris to show to the world. However, repression of illicit desire remains the key for development of both genders if they are to emerge from latency as "normal" sexual beings who identify with the gender they are to emulate. The Freudian analyst Karen Horney worked out the following drama for women: "There are two possible ways in which a girl may overcome the penis envy complex without detriment to herself.

She may pass from the autoerotic narcissistic desire for the penis to the woman's desire for the man (or the father), precisely in virtue of her identification of herself with her mother; or to the material desire for a child (by the father)."5 Repression is the key to defining psychic life, and Freud uses the concept to define how we appropriate our sexual organs. We have no conscious memories of forbidden desire, for this memory can only bring pain-as Oedipus found out when he discovered what was causing the plague in Thebes. The adult male cannot allow himself to recall that he desired his mother, for the pain that the superego would inflict for this crime would be unbearable. Comparably, the adult female cannot allow herself to recall her desire to kill her mother and exclusively enjoy her father. The mechanism of repression, casting illicit desire back into the unconscious, allows us to live with our libido and to cope with the

demands of civilization. Freud's anthropology stresses that civilization itself is a creation of repressed libido that has been sublimated into other goals than immediate gratification. And, for a Freudian theory of literature, this is of the utmost importance, as is suggested by the analysis of culture found in Totem and Taboo. Analogous concepts are found in Freud's paper of 1915, "Repression," which shows Freud attempting to analyze repression from the effects that it causes in the world: If we confine our observations to the results of its effect on the ideational part of the instinct-presentation, we discover that as a rule repression creates a substitute-formation. What then is the mechanism of such a substituteformation, or must we distinguish several mechanisms here also? Further, we know that repression leaves symptoms in its train. May we then regard substitute-fonnation and symptom-formation as coincident processes, and, if this is on the whole possible, does the mechanism of substitute-formation coincide with that of repression? So far as we know at present, it seems probable that the two are widely divergent, that it is not repression itself which produces substitute-formations and symptoms, but that these latter constitute indications of a return of the repressed and owe their existence to quite other processes.6 Freud tries here to complicate analysis that nonetheless is based on a unitary principle. Gratification is achieved through substitute-formation, whether it be in neurosis, taboo, or sublimation. It is a bit as if Freud were embarrassed to find that every aspect of psychic life and human culture could be deduced from the way in which libido demands gratification: either directly or through symbolic substitutes.

Freud's theory of neurosis parallels his theory of literature. Neurosis, like literature and taboo, is a mimetic activity, as Freud shows with his examples of substitute-formations. In anxiety-hysteria, for example, a case of animal phobia represents a displacement of a libidinal attitude toward the

patient's father. In "Repression," Freud analyzes this desire for the father and finds that it causes the patient to produce a mimetic symbol for the father: "As a substitute for him we find in a corresponding situation some animal which is more or less suited to be an object of dread" (112). The resulting fear of a wolf is a motivated mimetic relationship. The phobia is a transference of emotion displaced onto an object that can represent the father. Unconsciously, then, the neurotic, like the member of a primitive tribe, is a creative artist to the extent that they all-neurotic, primitive, and artist-invent representations.

Psychoanalytic theory deals with representations and their interpretation.

It is hardly surprising that literary theorists wanting some conceptual rigor are drawn to this theory. The tautological description of desire and its negation sets forth a unitary principle for the analysis of all 2 I Freudian Theories 65 behavior and cultural life as essentially mimetic displacements. Within the realm of culture, the principle is virtually omnipotent (although Freud dreamed of reducing culture to biology, the metaphysical separation of nature and history is never really challenged by him). All manifestations of culture can be dealt with as allegory. Mimesis is the great disease of civilization, for, as primitive peoples show, there is "a power of contagion which inheres in taboo as the property of leading into temptation, and of inciting to imitation."7 One mimetic form leads to another, but all can ultimately be explained by the unitary principle of desire and its negation.

Freud's own examples as literary theorist set forth several orientations for theorizing. In the search for the ultimate signified of representation, the theorist has several options. The ultimate reference may be the psyche of the writer; or it

may be culture itself, taken as the final determination of representation; or it may be an imagined psyche that informs the work in question. Consider Hamlet. What does Freudian theory tell the reader to do for a theoretical understanding of the play in Freudian terms? Whom does the theorist put on the couch: the imaginary Dane, Hamlet? Shakespeare? that patriarchical culture that speaks through Shakespeare's superego? the cultural taboos that speak through the textual consciousness that informs the play called Hamlet? Once a decision is made, the resulting allegory can in turn be converted into allegories that are the basis for psychoanalytical theory. Hamlet has a Hamlet complex, which "explains" his hesitancy at killing the man who killed the father that every Hamlet wants to kill in the first place. The Freudian theorist, following Freud's own lead, can theorize literature in terms of different relations that define the ultimate meaning of the text, and that meaning in tum defines a psychoanalytic structure. Powerful readings can be generated by this circular procedure, one invested with all the tautological power of the unitary principle of desire that lets nothing human escape its scope.

The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) is a favored text among theorists, for it imposes itself as a model for the interpretation of dreams as allegories and thus as a theoretical model explaining the production of literary texts. Freud considered dreams, those ordinary bouts of psychosis that everyone has every night, as the best road to the workings of the unconscious mind. Dreams can be defined as representations. And it then takes little theoretical imagination to draw an analogy between this definition and the traditional view that Jiterature is representation. In dreams, we perform the mimetic task that insanity undertakes when, refusing reality, the psychotic creates a fantasy world to replace reality.

In dreaming, we enact a world that is a substitute gratification. Freud remained constant in this view, right to the last work he wrote, An Outline of Psychoanalysis (1940): The formation of a dream can be provoked in two different ways. Either, on the one hand, an instinctual impulse which is ordinarily suppressed (an unconscious wish) finds enough strength during sleep to make itself felt by the ego, or, on the other hand, an urge left over from waking life, a preconscious train of thought with all the conflicting impulses attached to it, finds reinforcement during sleep from an unconscious element. In short, dreams may arise from either the id or from the ego. (23) In the same breath, Freud points out that the ego derives from the id, so that it seems Freud was reluctant to grant much importance to the role the ego plays in the creation of dreams. This underscores that it is libido, attached to conscious urges, that is of the greatest importance. These impulses, originating in the id, are repressed by the ego because they cannot be gratified but can find expression in dreams.

Dream is a substitute-formation of a special sort. It originates nonetheless in the principle of desire and its negation. Freud's development of a rhetoric to interpret dream as desire, frustrated desire, gratified through symbolism, is another literary move that recommends dream interpretation to the literary theorist. In "dream work," Freud found regular rhetorical strategies by which the unconscious, seeking mimetic satisfaction, creates a "translation of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose symbols and laws of composition we must learn by comparing the origin with the translation. "8 In effect, dream is another literary allegory. This conclusion is reached by a series of definitions.

The tautological chain that leads to this conclusion starts with the first principle that defines psychic life in terms of

desire and that then defines all psychic activity that is not gratification as a substitute representation of desire; with this definition, the theorist can argue that a dream is a form of representation of desire and hence, by definition, a mimetic form-literature, in short. And, by analogy, literature is a form of substitute gratification like a dream. This linkage turns on a powerful associative web of definitions that links desire, insanity, neurosis, dreaming, and creativity. No romantic philosopher-those German philosophers and doctors of whom Freud is a direct inheritor--cver created a more powerful analytical or metaphysical system capable of explaining all of culturc.9 Freud's elaboration of meaning in dream calls upon the metaphysical pair of form and content, or a variant thereon. In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud analyzes dreams as a "manifest" representation that l ...

2 I Freudian Theories 67 translates a "latent" content that is the ultimate representation of dream.

Manifest content is the visible form, whereas the latent representation is the ultimate message or content. This encoding of an unconscious thought in dream is a symbolic operation that makes of the dream a type of symbolic text, if not a poem. Many theorists have used the theory of dreams as a model for theorizing literary texts. They have taken Freud's descriptions of the mechanisms of dream work and used them as definitions for the rhetorical operations that preside over the elaboration of all literary texts. Every dream-text is a product of censorship and thus is the product of secondary elaboration by which the "dream-thoughts" are reinscribed in an acceptable form-acceptable to our "normal thought." 10 Surface meaning or manifest representation is always "very far removed from the real meaning of the dream" (456). This is a theoretical principle that also serves as a guide for interpretation, as all readers know who have encountered interpretations of favored texts

that insist on transforming manifest content into a symbol for the "real" meaning. Not surprisingly in this series of conceptual circles, the latent content usually turns out to be some variant on the basic Freudian allegory describing the psyche.

Dream differs from literature in that literature does rely primarily on language for its "message." In dreams, language is used as only one component of the veiled message, and often in ways having nothing to do with the literal meaning of words. Literal meanings are subverted by desire, and words acquire meanings that always exceed the contextual limits. Dream-cunning matches James Joyce in the capacity to pun. Yet, dream is a limited form of expression and usually produces meaning rather crudely by the juxtaposition of symbolic elements. It does not have the capacity to set forth logical relationships; these demand language for their expression. Closer to painting than to poetry, dream represents relationships in terms of simultaneity and parataxis. Or, perhaps film montage would be a more apt comparison for dream rhetoric, since Freud seems to think that simple contiguity of two elements means that the two elements have a meaningful relationship. Each part of the dream also maintains manifold relations to all the other parts, which is to say there is an overdetem1ination of meanings. Any single element can represent a multiplicity of meanings. Like any narrative, dream also unfolds along an axis, though dream pulls together associations through which the unconscious thought seizes upon the most disparate material to represent itself. It can draw upon daily occurrences or absurd scenes to stage those incongruous juxtapositions that enact our nightly psychosis. And in aH of this, as Freud insists, the unconscious seeks to satisfy a desire. In brief, the theorist need only substitute "literary work" for "dream": and voila, a ready-made theory of literature.

The Interpretation of Dreams is a rich mine for the exploring theorist.

An entire theory of literature is found in Freud's idea that dream symbolizations enacting wish-fulfillment involve the rhetorical techniques of displacement and condensation. In condensation, one element can represent a number of elements; for example, one person stands for a number of other people who can be associated with the person appearing in the dream. Condensation is poetic symbolization. Displacement, on the other hand, is demanded by the way that a dream is centered elsewhere: a dream is decentered in that what "is obviously the essential content of the dream-thoughts need not be represented at all in the dream" (336). Or directly represented. In a resume of his ideas on dreams presented in On Dreams (Uber den Traum of 1901), Freud says that the essential part of the dream message is represented in accessory details and in the chain of associations that link latent ideas with details. Displacement is a form of transposition that obliges the interpreter to look always beyond the deceitfulness of the manifest content and to sec that the center of representation is elsewhere. Displacement is a rhetorical strategy, one that imposes the necessity of hermeneutics. The reader may decide if the principle of displacement is not another curious tautology, one according to which A is always -A. With this paradox, of course, any conclusion may be deduced from the hermeneutic axiom. When an axiom carries within it a veiled contradiction, when a premise contains A and -A, any conclusion can be justified.

In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud's treatment of Oedipus Rex and of Hamlet points to other ambiguities of theory when literary texts are construed as dreams and dreams as texts, and all can be equated with the model that explains them. Incest occurs in Sophocles' version of

Oedipus, which might appear to grant recognition to the suppressed.

Freud thus calls that play a work analogous to a work of psychoanalysis (307). This suggests that the play is a work of theory-about itself, since the process of recognition is a feature of tragedy. But the play is also analogous to a dream: King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and wedded his mother Jocasta, is nothing more or less than a wish-fulfilment-the fulfilment of the wish of our childhood. But we, more fortunate than he, in so far as we have not become psychoneurotics, have since our childhood succeeded in withdrawing our sexual impulses from our mothers, and in forgetting our jealousy of our fathers. . . . As the poet brings the guilt of Oedipus to light by his investigation, he forces us to become aware of our own inner selves, in which the same impulses are extant, even though they are suppressed. (308) 2 I Freudian Theories 69 Negotiating the Freudian circle, we encounter a theory of the literary text tbat makes of it an analogue of the analytical text that theorizes it: both find their ultimate meaning in expressing the same fundamental psychic strocture. That structure does not exist, however, until it is represented.

Jn this regard, the play functions like a dream; which is the sense of Freud's commentary on Hamlet. The character Hamlet represents what is repressed. And the analyst then need only find an interpretation of the "inhibitory effects" that proceed from the implicit neurosis in the text. In this way, he can determine the wish-fantasy that is at the origin of the play, or so dixit Freud. There is more than a little confusion here in Freud's localizing of the neurosis: is it Hamlet's neurosis or Shakespeare's? or our culture's? or simply generalized textual neurosis? Freud speaks of Hamlet's repression. Like any normal son, the sickly hero would like to have killed his father. After his father's death,

Hamlet can do nothing against the man who "did away with his father and has taken his father's place with his mother-the man who shows him in realization the repressed desires of his own childhood" (310). At this point, Hamlet's unconscious would seem to be the source of the ultimate meaning of the play, though Freud equivocates here in a gesture that points to recurrent problems that beset psychoanalytical theory. Where is the ultimate signified of representation? There is no doubt about Freud's commitment to the unitary principle of desire, but in literature it is not always easy to pin down which psyche embodies it.

In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud seems to decide that the principle is located in an empirical person, the flesh and blood Shakespeare, a man who almost has a biography. The ultimate signified of Shakespeare's works must be this biography-when understood psychoanalytically.

Freud notes that Hamlet was written after Shakespeare's father died, which would have been a period during which he would have known a revival "of his own childish feelings in respect of his father." Related to this same period is the creation of Macbeth, a play Freud finds to be based "upon the theme of childlessness": Just as all neurotic symptoms, like dreams themselves, arc capable of hyperinterpretation, and even require such hyper-interpretation before they become perfectly intelligible, so every genuine poetical creation must have proceeded from more than one motive, from more than one impulse in the mind of the poet, and must admit of more than one interpretation. I have here attempted to interpret only the deepest stratum of impulses in the mind of the creative poet. (310-11) Freud grants a pluralism of theoretical possibilities and then withdraws them with the peremptory assertion that he has found the "deepest stratum"-suggesting by its topographical location

that all other interpretations must be based on this level. This obviously implies that the "deepest" is the "true" meaning. All other meanings are in some sense superficial and are finally secondary to the real realm from which mimetic activity originates. Like a dream, like a neurotic symptom-but not quite-the literary work is one more substitute for desire expressing itself from the deepest level of mind.

Oedipus Rex is a literary work that is a psychoanalytic structure.

Through its structure, the work is also a symptom that replicates itself. In Hamlet, Freud finds a work that is more like a dream that some psyche enacts for itself. In both cases, desire communicates in some way. But from whom and to whom? In his study of Leonardo da Vinci, Freud went further in pursuing ideas concerning the way a literary or artistic work communicates a symbolic substitute for desire. In his Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood (1910), Freud turned to the question of artistic communication and suggested a specificity to the artistic creation that he did not develop in The Interpretation of Dreams. Art aims at communication; dreams do not. But understanding communication in art also means understanding the artist's psyche, the source of dreams. So it is again axiomatic when Freud postulates that Leonardo's psyche is the ultimate referent to which his art refers.

In the essay's prelude to describing communication, which shows a lack of concern for empirical fact as well as dazzling theorizing, Freud describes Leonardo's psyche. He sets up a model for explaining the artist's communication by explaining Leonardo's presumed homosexuality as the result of a regression to a stage during which the boy had exclusive possession of his mother: "The boy represses his

love for his mother: he puts himself in her place, identifies himself with her, and takes his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love." 11 In this choice of narcissistic gratification, Leonardo became a homosexual, but a repressed one. As Freud describes Leonardo, he was one of those rare men whose gratification is found entirely in sublimation or the employment of libido in symbolic substitutes such as work or creation: The sexual instinct is particularly well fitted to make contributions of this kind since it is endowed with a capacity for sublimation: that is, it bas the power to replace its immediate aim by other aims which may .be valued more highly and which are not sexual. We accept this process as proved whenever the history of a person's childhood-that is, the history of his mental development-shows that in childhood this over-powerful instinct was in the service of sexual interests. We find further confirmation if a striking atrophy ,...

2 I Freudian Theories 71 occurs in the sexual life of maturity, as though a portion of sexual activity had now been replaced by the activity of the over-powerful instinct. (26) In brief, such was, in Freud's view, the origin of Leonardo's extraordinary intellectual interests, for the artist was one of those rare people whose libido is not totally repressed but manages to reinforce powerfully the desire for knowledge.

In framing a theory of artistic communication, Freud uses his theory of dreams. Freud finds that the message of Leonardo's works of art is latent-as in a dream-whatever be the work's manifest or visible contents, and that the message is essentially a communication of the dramas of the artist's childhood. This communication is unconscious: neither the artist (or writer) nor viewer (or reader) is conscious of what the message is. Both sender and receiver of the message are in some sense moved by it, but, without the proper theory to reveal this message to consciousness,

the message is encoded and decoded by unconscious processes. Freud puts it with some typical irony: Kindly nature has given the artist the ability to express his most secret mental impulses, which are hidden even from himself, by means of the works that he creates; and these works have a powerful effect on others who are strangers to the artist, and who are themselves unaware of the source of their emotion.

(65) It is a bit as if art were the process by which one unconscious speaks to another, or by which one id offers vicarious gratification to another. This is not surprising, for, by definition, the message is always postulated to be a variant expression of the unitary principle of desire that every id can understand.

Leonardo's art specifically communicates a portrayal of his narcissistic dramas. He began his career portraying two kinds of objects: If the beautiful children's heads were reproductions of his own person as it was in his childhood, then the smiling women are nothing other than repetitions of his mother Caterina, and we begin to suspect the possibility that it was his mother who possessed the mysterious smile-the smile that he had lost and that fascinated him so much when he found it again in the Florentine lady [the Mona Lisa]. (69) So the feature of a painting-the smile of the Mona Lisa or of the Louvre's Sainte Anne-signifies by making reference to the "most personal impressions in Leonardo's life" (71). And in this communication of his repressed desires, in the creation of androgynous figures like Leda, John the Baptist, and Bacchus, Leonardo achieved gratification: "In these figures Leonardo has denied the unhappiness of his erotic life and has triumphed over it in his art, by representing the wishes of the boy, infatuated with his mother, as fulfilled in this

blissful union of the male and female natures" (77). Or so again dixit Freud.

Freud proposes with this reading to have reached the limits of what is intelligible through analysis. Leonardo's tendency toward instinctual repression and his great capacity for sublimation are questions of biology.

Freud's modesty is as absurd as it is disarming, for he appears to think there might be something like genes for sublimation. In this willingness to recognize the limits of psychoanalysis, we encounter a Freud who is at once modest and ingenue, always ready to make biology a more primary mode of explication, for Freud maintained the pious hope that he might embed psychoanalysis within biology. Early in his career, Freud would have preferred knowledge based on confirmable empirical evidence, but Freud, I think, lost his capacity to think as a natural scientist as his "discoveries" carried him away from biology. Certainly there is nothing to demonstrate empirically with regard to his theory of artistic communication.

This theory derives from the postulate about the capacity for sublimation, and this is a category derived from the universal, unitary principle of gratification, a perfectly a priori notion. All the evidence in the world can only confirm instances of its positive and negative applications.

A or -A here entails that where there is no gratification, there is always its negation, that is, repression. Given that this is a logical principle, it is difficult to imagine a test to see if the principle exists or not.

If we forget for a moment the rather mechanical application of the pleasure principle-and its negation through sublimation-involved in Freud's interpretation of art, we may

find something seductive about the universality of Freud's erotic theory. Family dramas-the universal Oedipal conflict-generate the need for symbolic displacements that in tum create message systems that we all, unconsciously, can understand, since we read messages, unconsciously, as our own dramas, our own repressions and displacements. Freud is in this regard the great democrat of the id and repression. By definition, we can all understand symbolic substitutes for gratification, since the great unitary principle of desire is the final referent of every creation. But, having said that every drama is always the same drama, we may not of course be so easily seduced into going to the theater. Ultimately, it is always the same Hamlet complex, be it found in Hamlet, Shakespeare, or Elizabethan society at large.

Freud is not, however, always so seductive in his theorizing about literature. If it is obvious that he read widely and with pleasure; it is also obvious that, when theorizing about art and literature, his deference to 2 I Freudian Theories 73 the great artist or writer, to Leonardo or Goethe, can give way to a hardly disguised scorn for the infantile nature of symbolic compensation.

Freud's ambiguity about art lies behind his theory that, shades of Plato, art is only play. Even in his treatment of Leonardo, Freud voices the opinion that Leonardo remained infantile throughout his life: as an adult, Leonardo continued to play (88). Though Leonardo's "play instinct" atrophied somewhat as he reached maturity, Freud clearly laments that this infantile characteristic in Leonardo shows the difficulty that even the "greatest man" can have in tearing himself away from childhood in which "he has enjoyed the highest erotic bliss" (90).

Art is thus bound up with infantile behavior. Another of the series of footnotes on Plato, this vein in Freud repeats the

structure-and in part the substance-of Plato's views of poets when he says that the poet or artist is a child who plays. In The Republic, Plato reduces the poet and artist to mere copiers who, in imitating the world of forms from which they are twice removed, produce ontologically deficient representations of ideas that are of no value. The representations are products of ignorance, since the artist and poet works with neither correct knowledge nor direct experience of the origins of mimesis: the world of ideal forms that is outside of the artist's ken. For Plato, art and poetry are mere forms of play, not to be taken seriously, that can at best only please the vile populace. In his analysis of literary creation, Freud repeats much of this view. Mimesis is undertaken as play, representing fantasies that the adult should be ashamed of but that, encoded as literature, can get around censor mechanisms and offer popular gratification. The theory of unconscious communication parallels Plato's view that the artist communicates, in ignorance, forms about which he knows nothing.

Freud's scornful Platonism with regard to literature is clear in a lecture of 1907, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming." This is a relatively early piece, though I do not think anything Freud wrote later changes the basic viewpoint. Children play as a substitute for the gratification that reality denies them. Freud's ontology turns on Platonic definitions: the opposite of play is the "real." In play, children create a fantasy realm that derives from, even as it opposes, reality. In maturing, adults give up play, but not of course the need for gratification. The unitary principle of desire finds embodiment in our fantasies, generated by the renunciation of real gratification and play, for fantasies are substitute-formations: "The motive forces of phantasy are unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality."12 The equation of dream and psychosis, neurosis and cultural substitutes

follows neatly from the primary tautological principle of desire and its negation.

Led on by the power and scope of his metaphysics, Freud was constantly tempted to be a general theorist of culture and to find in culture the ultimate locus of our neuroses. Even in his brief essay on creative writers, Freud's analysis of the poet extends far beyond the circumscribed space of the individual psyche; for, with a hubris worthy of his hero Oedipus, Freud wants to define a transindividual psychic space of which he will be the original explorer. To this end, he makes a distinction between two types of literature and two realms for the location of unconscious desire: the individual and the social collectivity.

Freud notes that we are today familiar with the imaginative writer who offers his fantasies directly as literature. But much of traditional literature has been created by writers who take over ready-made materials from myth and legend or tradition. The modern writer often enacts his fantasies, his surrogate gratifications, by splitting up his ego "into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting current of his own mental life in several heroes" (150). So, the general rule for the elaboration of the modern work is much the same as in dream: an experience in the present awakens a memory, usually from childhood, "from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work" (151). And this surrogate satisfaction for the poet is in effect what Freud calls a continuation of or a substitute for the play that writers, like everyone else, could indulge in as children.

Freud wanted to apply the same matrix to cultural history. Influenced by Haeckel' s then fashionable idea that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, Freud offers the hypothesis that literary works can also draw upon the

childhood of the race. This can be a pernicious idea, for, as we saw in Freud's anthropology, it leads to categorizing cultures in terms of their degrees of maturity. It is dubious that a scientist can make a meaningful comparison showing that cultures possess the same traits as biological individuals. Such comparisons are inevitably motivated by racist desires to denigrate the culture that is not "mature." In any case, Freud subscribes to the idea that literature, using ready-made traditions and myths, can incorporate the "wishful phantasies" or the dreams of youthful humanity. Applied to the youthful psyche of the race, the unitary principle of desire finds its most hyperbolic application, here and throughout heud's work, in his attempt to explain entire cultures and their development. The appeal to Haeckel's principle adds to the theory a patina of biological justification that nothing in biology justifies. The collective unconscious, I would add, has no empirical existence except in the racist fantasies of certain followers of Freud.

In conclusion, then, does Freud's theory demonstrate the strength of a tautology, of a unitary principle and its negation, to describe our 2 I Freudian Theories 75 experience of the world? Is it in any sense useful to derive from this principle the theory that the id and the instinctual drive for gratification determine, through mimetic surrogates, the creation of literature? In defense of Freudian theories of literature, it can be argued that this hypothesis accounts for many features of art and literature, and not least of all it provides an answer as to why anyone should be interested in art and literature in the first place. What in "non-real" stories and fictions could possibly attract a "serious" adult? Strictly interpreted, Freud's unitary principle defines reading, like writing, as an erotic experience of which, in a psychoanalytic sense, we refuse awareness. Responding to the forbidden joys of fantasy, we remain

repressed even in our most innocent pleasures-if the notion of innocence has any meaning in this context.

Beyond the pleasure principle of seduction by definition, it is clear that the Freudian tautology is at once too vast and too limiting to account for the multiplicity of experiences we encounter in literature. It accounts for everything, and hence for little. Perhaps this explains why many theorists wrap themselves in Freud's mantle and then write Freud out of their theories. They do this by diluting his principle through the introduction of a multiplicity of explanatory factors into their conceptual models. Strict European Freudians (and some not so strict, such as Lacan) have long been angry about the way pragmatic and puritanical American theorists have rewritten Freudian analysis as ego psychology or transfom1ed it into a reading of adaptive strategies. Freudian often ceases to be Freud (and vice versa) in America-as, for example, in the only self-proclaimed Freudian study I have ever read in the Scientific American, one called "Unconscious Mental Functioning." In this essay, an American analyst, Joseph Weiss, hoisting the Freudian flag, in effect "disproves" the predictive value of the pleasure principle: My hypothesis, which my colleagues and I have now tested, assumes psychological problems are rooted not in repressed impulses that maladaptively seek gratification (as the dynamic hypothesis would say) but in painful ideas known as "pathogenic" beliefs. These unconscious, irrational ideas cause, and help maintain, psychological disturbance. They are maladaptive in that they prevent people from seeking certain highly desirable goals; the beliefs warn people that if they do try to attain such goals, they will endanger themselves and suffer fear, anxiety, guilt, shame or remorse. Pathogenic beliefs can vary from person to person.13 Mere recognition of unconscious mental processes hardly seems enough to justify the Freudian label, though that is not my point in bringing up

this example, by which I merely wish to point up a certain Freudian fate.

Clearly, in this theoretical formulation the analyst has rejected the effects of the working of the id and invented an ethical notion-called a pathogenic idea-that derives its sanction from the ideals of goaloriented American culture. For it is pathogenic by definition not to want to achieve one's desires. The Freudian tautological principle of desire has been displaced by a probably equally tautological formulation, but one more congenial to American belief in easily definable goals.

American analysts play fast and free with Freudian concepts, and so do literary theorists, conscious of the charge of reductionism that has often been directed against the Freudian readings of literature. Or, perhaps because they are bored with the inevitability of readings that always make of literature the expression of desire, literary theorists have diluted Freudian theory in an eclecticism of crude empirical motifs that usually have little theoretical rigor. My final example comes from The Cambridge Companion to Freud. In making of Freud the philosopher we all suspected he was, the book's editors endorse neo-Freudian eclecticism by offering Richard Wollheim's non-Freudian explanation of Freud's theory of literature. It begins by recognizing Freud's attachment to tautologies, for art is art: For all his attachment to the central European tradition of romanticism, a work of art remained for Freud what historically it had always been: a piece of work. And, second, art, at any rate in its higher reaches, did not for Freud connect up with that other and far broader route by which wish and impulse assert themselves in our lives: neurosis.14 Pointing out that Freud is supposed to have said that we should not place neurosis in the foreground when something great is achieved, Wollheirn continues his essay by using

this passing remark to dissolve all conceptual links equating art and neurosis: But once we abandon this equation, we lose all justification for thinking of art as exhibiting a single or unitary motivation. For outside the comparative inflexibility of the neurosis, there is no single unchanging form that our characters or temperaments assume. (264) And so the artist becomes, in this view, an adept at flexibility and the opposite of the neurotic that Freud saw all of us harboring within. This may be true, but such a view of writers has little to do with Freud. I do not know if it is an accident that both Weiss and Wollheirn apparently live in California, but it does not seem an accident that American theorists can rarely accept the self-defining rigor with which Freud worked out his definition of desire, its negation, and the mimetic 2 I Freudian Theories 77 surrogates that could offer it gratification, be it in neurosis, fantasy, or art. In the United States, Freud seems hardly to have survived the Freudians-which we should bear in mind presently when confronting the wiles of that French Freudian Jacques Lacan. Lacan wanted to return to Freud, but the result of that return gives us a Freud who is hardly the Freudian I have sketched out here. However, Lacan's Freud is certainly no adept at adaptive flexibility-an all-American tautology that allows us to forget about what obsesses us as a country, namely, sex.

Hermeneutics and Historicism

Marx and Freud offer totalizing worldviews that explain the production of culture in a priori terms. Those puzzled skeptics who do not accept the definitions of culture that Freudian and Marxist theories stipulate may well find Freudian and Marxist worldviews to be analogous to the worldview of some exotic and remote culture: there is simply nothing commensurable between these theories and the rationalist worldview held by most educated members of the

community. And there is little likelihood of dialogue between those rationalist and skeptical critics and those Marxists or Freudians who lay claim to finding ultimate meanings accessible only to those to whom theory reveals the determining locus of a text. This is an unfortunate dilemma for which a solution can only be found, I think, when Marxists and Freudians find some empirical access to the work they do. And this could only occur if Freudians and Marxists relinquish their quest for totalization. Freudian and Marxist theories are hardly the only ones that traffic in revelation of totalities, though they offer the most totalizing scope as theories of culture. Or perhaps I should say that these theories overtly propose a totalizing theory, for it is rare in literary theory that theorists are not finally tempted to grant themselves all-embracing theories of all that is human. And we shall now see that even theoretical views of literature that take the form of theories of interpretation are often as totalizing as theories that seek to explain how texts are produced, such as Marxism or psychoanalysis.

I refer now to hermeneutics and historical interpretation. In a strict sense, hermeneutics asks what are the grounds for textual exegesis, especially of ancient texts that may not share our worldview. These interpretive questions are, if one wishes, amenable to rational inquiry and probabilistic views based on empirical evidence. However, the theorists I want to discuss here-Heidegger, his immediate disciple Gadamer, and 78 the more distanced disciple Foucault-are concerned with how historicity grounds truth and meaning. They ask how texts arc inflected and informed by history, and vice versa. Granting some dimension to history that transcends mere chronology, historical hermeneutics inevitably becomes a process by which history is construed as both the basis for and the result of textual exegesis. In this circularity, history is the ground of meaning, and meaning gives rise to history-when orchestrated by the theorist as seer.

This choice of historicizing theorists is motivated by a certain reverse symmetry in political and ethical terms: Heidegger and Foucault represent right- and left-wing versions of thinkers for whom history is the determining ground of texts, meaning, and the criteria for truth.

Politically, each was turned in a different direction, but they were motivated by the same desire to renovate our thought about history and values. Heidegger looked back to the ancient Greeks for a prelapsarian paradise when, as he often said, the meaning of Being had not been obscured; whereas Foucault looked forward to a future when history would enable truth to be emancipatory in some utopian sense. For both philosophers, hermeneutics enjoined them to interpret texts so as to reveal the conventional nature of our beliefs in truth, and especially in the grounds for the general truth of our worldview. With interpretation, our worldview can then be judged by the implications of the revelation that all meaning is in some sense historical. One clear implication is that the historicity of truth and of our criteria for rationality denies any ultimate ground to truth and rationality. This historical attack on rationality is, moreover, the basis for the argument usually mustered by the "antifoundationalist" position of postmodern views of truth and verification.

History-or that active agent for change called historicity-is hardly a neutral ground. For Heidegger, and for Foucault in his first works, history is something like a conspiratorial process. History is construed as a process of concealment that has repressed whatever might reveal its arbitrary workings. Heidegger developed this view in a series of works whose common element is the view that the history of Western thought has hidden thought about Being, what Heidegger calls the ground of all beings. For Foucault, this conspiracy initially took the form of the repression of the irrational by reason, specifically in the form of reason's

repression of madness from the Renaissance to the present. Foucault's thought about repression took different shapes later in various revisions proposing other models for his historical hermeneutics. In his last work, he began to analyze the hermeneutics by which we have understood our sexuality. Politically and ethically, it is important to see the common denominator between Heidegger and Foucault, for historicism is used by radical reactionaries as well as by tenured revolutionaries. Both rely upon a kind of anonymous conspiratorial model of history to concoct a postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion, to borrow from Paul Ricoeur.

Sharing with Freudian and Marxist theory a belief in the necessity of revelation, historical hermeneutics aims at laying bare what history has hidden from us. That this commonality linked together the former Nazi Heidegger and the ex-Marxist Foucault points to a postmodern rejection, when not a hatred, of the empirically demonstrable, and finally to a thirst for transcendence. The revolt against the empirically evident is a springboard for much theory, one leading to the most unpredictable politics.

Heidegger's influence on the young Marxist Foucault was decisive.

Heidegger's influence on literary studies in North America has been more indirect but pervasive and singularly important, not least of all for its explicit defense of tautological thinking. Moreover, the theoretical activity called deconstruction is Heideggerian in origin. (We shall tum to deconstruction in a subsequent chapter.) One finds deconstruction at work in Heidegger's first major work, Being and Time (published as Sein und Zeit in 1927). Heidegger's deconstruction was directed against Husserl's attempts to do a phenomenological description of everyday perception, a description Heidegger showed to be

essentially metaphysical in nature. In this same work, Heidegger proposed that all true thought turns upon itself in a "hermeneutic circle." The necessarily circular nature of thought provides the conceptual underpinnings of this phenomenological study that ultimately wants to describe Being. But Heidegger declares he must first describe the being of that being through whom Being is revealed. Before describing Being, he must describe human being, or Dasein, that being that is always already there. And human being can only be known through the revelation of truth that Dasein must "always already" have before anything can be known.

Before human beings can know anything, it seems that they must know that they know something, for example, that they know they know.

This formulation suggests the danger of infinite regress that underlies- and undermines-Heidegger's project. Nonetheless, Heidegger makes one of the strongest cases for meaningful tautologies that any modem thinker has made. His entire career could be characterized as an attempt to think out the tautologies that, when their role is revealed, lay bare the historical determinations of thought. Hence the nature of many of Heidegger's works that seemingly ask for a mere definition: What is Metaphysics? or What is Thinking? Or works that offer definitions of objects of philosophical thought, such as that of an artwork, or the prin-] i ciple of sufficient reason, or the nature of identity. Heidegger's work engages us in the question, first, as to whether a tautology can be meaningful and, if so, whether tautologies can offer a meaningful theory of art and literature--or poetry. And by poetry Heidegger means nothing less man language and world. The belief in the meaningful tautology-as opposed to a trivial definition-is central to Heidegger's view of language and its powers. It is

not simply that tautologies and definitions can only exist in language; rather, Heidegger proposes that language--or poetry-is coterminous with world. Language must therefore be the center of thought. Thought, language, and, finally, world are synonymous, as Heidegger claims with increasing insistence after his failure to complete Being and Time. If it can be granted that language is the equivalent of world, it can then be argued that tautologies are meaningful. And poetry is thus a founder of worldviews. The historical roles of Homer, Plato, and the Bible give some plausibility to this extraordinary proposition about poets' role as founders of culture. And, needless to say, this inflation of literature is all heady stuff for the theorist wishing to make a contemporary apology for poetry: what theorist does not want to answer HOlderlin's question about the use of poets in destitute times-"Wozu Dichter?" In Being and Time, Heidegger sets forth a view of language that he was to modify in his later works; this view has been influential in its own right, for it is Heidegger's strongest statement of the necessity of tautological thinking. In Being and Time, he believes that meanings preexist the natural languages that express meanings. Human beings are thrown into the world, but they possess the capacity for discourse, an openness to meanings, that allows them to have understanding-for meanings are disclosed through Dasein's capacity for disclosure. This is a circular way of saying that human beings are constituted, in part at least, by their capacity for language. Without Dasein there is no meaning, for meaning is a state of intelligibility that comes to exist only through human being's capacity for discourse-which is to say, to disclose the meanings that constitute Dasein 's being. Whatever be the philosophical interest in separating language and meaning, it is of great significance that Heidegger, like many contemporaries, wants to define human beings as beings capable of language.

Heidegger separates real language and meaning. This is essentially a metaphysical separation, one showing that in Being and Time Heidegger still subscribes to some notion of logos. Separating meaning, discourse, and ordinary language, Heidegger describes truth as "unconcealment." The locus of truth is not the proposition, as most modern philosophy holds; rather, truth is a letting be seen. Truth conceived of as "aletheia," or revelation, is more "primordial" than the idea that truth consists in some correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs.

According to Heidegger, truth conceived as disclosure is necessary before the proposition can be true: lhe light of disclosure is what lets one sec the correspondence or relation between the proposition and the world. And this is what Heidegger means, in refurbishing the Greek, that truth is aletheia. Disclosure reveals meanings through discourse, though this revelation is always circular: hermeneutics means disclosing what is already grasped by human beings in their primordial openness to world.

Rejecting Cartesian subjectivity, Heidegger describes human openness to truth as a circular interpretation grounded in revelation: In every case this interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance-in a fore-having. As the appropriation of understanding the interpretation operates in Being towards a totality of involvements which is already understanding-a Being which understands. When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, and this is always done under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted. In every case interpretation is grounded in something we see in advance-aforesight.

I Truth is a matter of seeing, of disclosure that we must necessarily have already before we can see if we have reached the truth. This is not unlike the demonstration Socrates makes in the Meno.

Let us try to see how this circularity might work, in ordinary language, for a literary theorist. We can illustrate this necessary circularity by asking, from Heidegger's viewpoint, what an artwork or a poem is. As literary theorists, we desire precisely that knowledge. How do we get it? As mere empiricists, we might look around the world and say, "There is a poem." To which a Heideggerian answers, "How do you know that that object is a poem? Give me your criteria." Of course, before we can justify our criteria, we must point out a poem to which they apply.

Otherwise, we might apply them to a fire engine and then find ourselves obliged to admit that the object doesn't meet the criteria. But our criteria must be derived from poems in the first place. So how did we derive them if we didn't know what a poem was when we went out to look for poems (or artworks or whatever) in the first place? We must have already known what a poem was before we could find one and derive a definition from it. Therefore, says the Heideggerian, understanding is circular, deriving from meanings that we possess in the first place when we turn to the world to interpret what we find in it.

This Heideggerian defense of tautology is ingenuous, though it smacks of a reversal of the Humpty Dumpty principle: I can only mean what words make me mean. More interestingly, the defense of tautology also brings up the question as to how we get into language in the first place.

Tue sometime school teacher and philosopher Wittgenstein wrestled with a way of describing how one enters language--

ordinary language that names pencils and emotions as well as metaphysics. The way into language, Wittgenstein argued, is language. This is perhaps not as circular as it sounds, for the child must build progressively in language, entering language through language, to acquire finally the self-sustaining worldview that language proposes. Perhaps Wittgenstein's way into language might be likened to a spiral by which the world acquires ever greater contours as one acquires more mastery of language games.

Wittgenstein's view suggests analogies that clarify Heidegger's belief that human beings become human beings as they grasp meanings that constitute their world. For Wittgenstein, the world is constituted by humans' entry into the language games that make up their worldview.

Heidegger dfffers from Wittgenstein, however, in positing some human openness as the precondition for the possibility of language. In Being and Time, Heidegger defines humans through their capacity for "significance" or disclosure of meanings through human openness: In significance itself, with which Dasein is always familiar, there lurks the ontological condition which makes it possible for Dasein, as something which understands and interprets, to disclose such things as "significations"; upon these, in turn, is founded the Being of words and of language. (121) This is tautological reasoning-and it is not clear we have said much when we say that, when we have language, we have language. The tautology entails, in Heidegger's development of it, that meanings are not a series of names that are simply appended to objects. Before meaning exists in language, it exists as the series of disclosed relations that make up our human mode of being in the world. This point of view leads to Heidegger's subsequent belief that language is world, a position developed after Being and Time. Abandoning his attempts to interpret the meaning of

Being through analyzing human beings and human temporality, Heidegger undertook a series of meditations on our loss of the sense of being. These works, in the form of lectures and essays, describe language, not Dasein, as the place where disclosure occurs, and above all in poetry-for poetry is the origin of truth.

I confess here my own hesitant attitude about Heidegger. On the one hand, with his endless lament about our loss of a sense of the difference between Being and beings, he seems like a candidate for a Monty Python skit. On the other hand, aside from Wittgenstein, there is probably no other thinker who has found such original ways to defend the power of tautology and thereby give credibility to the idea that language informs our world. However, a caveat is in order with regard to the idea that language informs our world. For skepticism is, I think, the best reaction to the usual cliches holding that language is like a pair of eyeglasses that selects features we see in the world. And skepticism is equally well recommended for the contemporary belief that scientific questions are informed by language. But these are not exactly the issues in Heidegger's thought. Heidegger proposes that tautologies reveal structures that stand disclosed and are in some sense constitutive of our historical world. From Heidegger's perspective ,tautologies define our possibilities of world. For a theory of literature, this belief suggests that a work written in language is far more than an imitation of nonlinguistic realities.

These ideas are developed in Heidegger's later essays in which he meditates on language as the source of our access to being-and on metaphysics as the villain that has made us lose contact with Being.

Metaphysics is everywhere. In our scientific era it dominates the world in the form of technology, for Heidegger argues at

great length that metaphysical thinking has eventuated in the forms of thought that seek to dominate being from above, as it were. And in our aesthetic experience, metaphysics dominates the way we think about an artwork, which leads us to distort our experience of art when we theorize about art by using metaphysical concepts such as form and content. Metaphysics also stops the circular thinking that might lead us to authentic understanding.

Circular thinking is censured by scientific or technological thought that can think only through rationally defined goals. And in the guise of logic, metaphysics refuses the idea that only the circle can disclose the truth of what we want to understand. Metaphysics engulfs us in a totalizing conspiracy, a historical conspiracy of which we all are innocent by intent and guilty in execution.

For an initial encounter with Heidegger's theory of literature, perhaps the most accessible work is his "The Origin of the Work of Art." This book-length essay traffics in nationalist terminology while remaining abstractly aloof toward the immediate Nationalist Socialist cultural context of Blut und Boden. (Published in 1950 in Holzwege, but first written in 1935, the essay states, even in today's revised version, that every historical Volk wants its Boden, or territory.) In this regard, Heidegger's introduction to art is emblematic of his politics of abstract ambiguity: the essay is at once committed to right-wing nationalism and silent about specific ways of interpreting the "historical" claims that a Volk might make. Poland isn't mentioned once.

Heidegger wants to demonstrate theoretically that the "foreunderstanding" of art shows aletheia, art, language, and poetry all to be equivalent forms of disclosure and ultimately the "truth of Being." The grounds for the proof of these assertions is disclosure. Disclosure reveals the truth of

tautology, or, as Heidegger put it some twenty years later in his prefatory musings to his essay on the principle of identity, "Der Satz der Identitat," "Bewcisen lasst sich in diesem Bereich nichts, abcr weisen manchcs"--or, in English, without the alluring internal rhyme," Nothing allows itself to be proved in this realm, but much can be shown. "2 To bring about disclosure, Heidegger demands the removal of the metaphysical blinders that prevent seeing what art discloses and hence knowing what art is. As our Socratic exercise tried to show above, this knowledge already presupposes a hermeneutic circle in that we must know in advance what a work of art is before we can even know we are looking at it in order to describe it. In the essay on the work of art, we are called upon to look at the work, and, in looking, see truth disclosed: disclosure shows that the artwork is a setting into being of truth, including the truth of what the artwork is. This description is as circular a proposition as one could want. The question remains: is this a meaningful tautology? does it disclose anything? Heidegger's strategy in the essay on the origins of the work of art, and in many later works, is to stipulate a series of tautologies that effect metaphorical identifications of language, truth, and poetry. The metaphors are in a sense necessarily true-and, for a hostile critic, perhaps trivial for that very reason. Truth is revelation or disclosure. Art is disclosure, hence art is defined as truth. Language is disclosure, and so is poetry. This means, Heidegger maintains, that all language is originally poetry, as is all art and truth, and so finally is our world, for world is disclosed originally through language, poetry, and truth. This is "seen" when one stops using the metaphysical determinations that Plato and Aristotle bequeathed to us for describing the artwork, determinations such as the idea that the artwork is an embodied idea or that it is formed substance. These determinations impose on the artwork metaphysical notions that apply perhaps to tools, but a poem or painting is not a tool.

And, in the case of works of art, metaphysical descriptions cover up aletheia. Truth must be captured in the pristine freshness of first vision.

These equivalences of language, truth, and poetry are true by definition simply because language allows these couplings. That such definitions can be made grants a certain plausibility to Heidegger's argument for the hermeneutic circle. Unfortunately for the cause of Heidegger's demonstration, he makes a concrete demonstration of what he means by setting truth into the artwork. In the essay on the work of art, he interprets a van Gogh painting and offers raptures on the truth that is disclosed in the world he finds existing in one of van Gogh's paintings of peasant shoes: In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, in its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbirth and shivering at the menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth, and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself. 3 Various critics have politely or less than politely scoffed at this "truth" of the painting of peasant shoes. However, the epistemological problem brought up by Heidegger's "disclosure" is of great interest: if van Gogh's shoes reveal philosophical kitsch to the Black Forest philosopher, on what grounds do we say he is wrong? And equally to the point is the question, What are Heidegger's grounds for saying he is right? To the latter question, he would answer, Aletheia. This answer is not unlike that of a certain British philosopher claiming he could not doubt the evidence of his senses when confronting skepticism about whether a rock he sees is really there or not. It seems that

the limits of Humpty Dumpty's power to decree meanings are drawn at this point: we are free to agree, but equally as free to disagree, when it comes to "seeing" a definition. (Monty Python also developed this point in several skits.) From the point of view of linguistics or pragmatic social philosophy, only an appeal to some community of acceptance can put an end to the discussion, since, according to linguistics or pragmatic philosophy, the community is the final locus for the criteria that concern the "correctness" of interpreting language, and this would apply to what is seen "through" language. As long as vision or disclosure is a question of idiosyncratic affirmation, there is little to be said. What Heidegger sees is what he sees, though by the standards of the (or a) community, it is dubious whether anyone else would see in those rumpled shoes a metaphori - cal essay in fundamental ontology.

Perhaps the real problem with Heidegger's effusions springs from another confusion. Heidegger wants to show that art shows truth. This is a theoretical generalization. Yet in fact he engages in interpretation, which is to say he proposes meanings that are generated by a critical framework; at least this is what interpretation usually is. But in r Heidegger's case there is a self-defeating circularity at work, since his interpretive framework becomes the object itself of the interpretive demonstration. Earth and world arc metaphors to describe the nature of the work, but Heidegger uses them to describe the work so as to demonstrate that it demonstrates its own nature in theoretical terms. This move is quite arbitrary and would apply as much to a Greek temple as to a well-shaped garbage can.

Heidegger's example points up the difficulty of moving from theory to exegesis: how does one move from tautologies to what can be seen in the world, including what is seen in the world of literary texts? This difficulty seems endemic to all

theory. We can all entertain the plausibility of definitions that equate art with language, language with disclosure, disclosure with truth, and so forth. The tautological nature of these metaphorical moves elicits an assent that, momentarily at least, springs from the coherence of the propositions. This assent is also promoted by the way Heidegger is drawing upon a great Western tradition when he declares that language, conceived of as poetry, is coextensive with Being and logos, and thus poetry is at the origin of what comes to exist as world. One source of this view is of course the New Testament in which logos, as disclosed by the light of reason, is at the origin of what is. Paradoxically--0r perhaps not-the biblical view springs from the fountainhead of metaphysics.

In later essays, many of which are dedicated to exegesis of poems, Heidegger does not risk the exegetical leaps he performs with van Gogh.

Rather, he turns to poets such as HOlderlin or Trakl to show that poetry demonstrates his theses in self-referential circular moves: authentic poetry is about the disclosure of Being, which is to say that it is about itself conceived as the advent of logos, truth, and being. To describe this advent, Heidegger defines the word "Ereignis" or "event" to mean more or less what he wants it to mean, which has given no small difficulty to translators who are bound to respect a linguistic community loath to change meanings as easily as Humpty Dumpty. In the later essays and lectures, the "event of appropriation"-as Ereignis is usually translatedcan be taken as another tautological formulation defining logos and language as the openness of being or the collection of what can be said.

Heidegger takes a new tack to defend tautologies. Tautologies are meaningful because language maintains the

difference between things.

This is a rather extraordinary claim. Heidegger seems to think that without language, in some meaningful sense, things would not be. (The skeptic wonders how, without language, early invertebrates sorted themselves out in the Paleozoic Era.) Language grants being and maintains the difference between Being and beings-whether mere mortals are aware of it or not-and thus allows world to be.

The concept of "difference" has played an extraordinary role recently in Continental philosophy. The Humpty Dumpty in every modern theorist seems compelled to redefine the concept as he sees fit. The play with "difference" is symptomatic of the importance given tautologies by recent Continental philosophers, for the concept is often used to set off the "same" in semantic games turning on identity and nonidentity, A and -A. Heidegger's role in foregrounding difference is central to understanding how the concept comes to play center stage in more recent literary theory. Difference clinches the negative and positive poles of tautologies by melding them into the unitary principles that Heidegger uses to define the world. A is different from B, thus B is -A; and so A and B can be joined as a tautological identity.

For example, poetry is set against metaphysics or the language of science and logic for a description of the advent of what Heidegger calls the Geviert, or the foursome of heaven and earth, god and men, that make up the world through their difference. In "Das Wesen der Sprache" (The Essence of Language) he offers a series of permutations on tautologies that are defined through their difference. Nearness is not distance as measured by mathematics and metaphysics; rather, the two are joined as difference in maintaining the world generated by the tautology they

form: Das Wesende der Nlihe ist nicht der Abstand, sondern die Be-wegung des Gegen-einander-tiber der Gegenden des Weltgeviertes. Diese Be-wegung ist die Nahe als die Nahnis. Sie bleibt das Un-nahbare und ist uns am fernstcn, wenn wir "iiber" sie sprechen, Raum and Zeit aber konnen als Parameter weder Nlihe bring en noch ermessen. 4 (Roughly: The essential being of nearness is not distance, but the movement of the against-one-another-over the region of the world foursome. This movement is the near as nearness [neologism, in German]. It remains the un-nearable and is farthest from us when we speak "over" [about] it; space and time, however, can, as parameters, neither bring nor measure the near.) In this play of difference and sameness, nearness and distance can be defined as not each other, thus they move, blending into each other, for Heidegger would reject the logical distinction of A or -A. Metaphysics as logic speaks "over" or about something and deforms it, as when metaphysical thought measures time as a series of discrete units. By using the concept of difference, Heidegger can seemingly reject logic while continuing his tautological thinking: tautologies unite all in their difference. There is something commonsensical lurking in all this, which is that distance and nearness are relative notions. However, in a more Heideggerian example, we discover that language in its difference grants time its being, and so we should say, "die Zeit zeitigt"-an expression that literally says that "time makes time" (or "time times" or "time is time") (213) and which might be glossed as something like time bestows time, or time· grants temporaJity. Even Humpty Dumpty might think tautological thinking reaches a limit in this caricature of thought.

Central to this semantic play is the belief that language maintains the difference of beings that constitute the world. One can experience a philosophical frisson upon contemplating that it is this difference that allows language

to grant being-defined originally as the difference between beings and Being. Difference-der Unter-Schied, as Heidegger writes it-holds apart world and things, as demonstrated by the little hyphen in the center of the word. Or, according to the essay "Die Sprache," difference calls forth beings, and this calling is the essence of language and also the essence of authentic poetry.5 Heidegger's contribution to a potential theory of literature is nothing more, or less, than making of poetry the tautological founder of world as language in its difference and sameness. Perhaps it would be accurate to paraphrase this belief by saying that language encodes "difference" in such a way that tautologies carve out differences where they would not exist without language. The argument that difference is simply a predicate that presupposes a relation is rejected by a Heideggarian as metaphysical.

Notably in his work on identity and difference, Identitiit und Differenz, the logic of relations is explicitly rejected by Heidegger as secondary to the ontological difference of Being and beings.

The analytically inclined can accuse Heidegger of hypostasizing "difference" and turning it into an allegorical figure that allows him to think a-logically. Difference allows him to use tautological oppositions without respecting the logic of negation. It is relevant here to anticipate our discussion of poststructuralism and point out that, in following Heidegger, the French philosopher Derrida further develops this allegorical mode of thought with his notion of "differance." After finding metaphysics still at work in Heidegger, the French successor to Heidegger calls for a more powerful notion of difference in the conclusion to his essay on Heidegger "Ousia et gramme": There is probably a difference that has been less thought out even than the difference between Being and beings. It is probably no more

possible to name it as such in our language. Beyond Being and beings this difference differing from itself without ceasing, would trace out (itself), this differance would be the first and last trace if it were possible to speak here of an origin and an end."6 Heidegger's influence is clear here in this hyperbolic dream of some foundations of language that would be beyond mere logic or any other rational foundations of thought. The belief in a nontranscendental transcendence baptized "differance" is not the least important aspect of Heidegger's a-logical legacy to recent theory.

The other most important aspect of Heidegger's influence is found in the tautologies of historicism that have marked much contemporary critical theory. The starting point of contemporary hermeneutical theory is that history is all-determining in the unfolding of thought. Heidegger's disciple Hans-Georg Gadamer can offer a clear exposition of the theses of historicism. Gadamer pursues the following circular reasoning, if not logical error, in his hermeneutic theory: everything occurs in time, thus time occurs in everything. Therefore, all is "determined" by history in the sense that there is no "product" of culture that is not inserted into history, including the knowledge that allows us to know that radical historicity is (historically) true. Or, as Gadamer puts it succinctly in Truth and Method: Does the fact that one is set within various traditions mean really and primarily that one is subject to prejudices and limited in one's freedom? Is not, rather, all human existence, even the freest, limited and qualified in various ways? If this is true, then the idea of an absolute reason is impossible for historical humanity. Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms, i.e. it is not its own master, but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates. 7 This is a debatable proposition, but typical of the circular reasoning embraced by a historicism that

believes that because all occurs in history, all is an irrational accident, indeed a caprice produced by history. This historicism is the dominant form of recent self-conscious irrationalismirrationalism in the sense that it claims that no ultimate ground can be shown for a rationality that necessarily happens in time. In its most vulgar vulgate, the logical error is akin to that made by Hegelian historists, though with a reverse angle: rather than granting logical necessity to each succeeding historical state and what it contains, one finds in each succeeding state an irrational accumulation of events that are utterly arbitrary.

From Gadamer's Heidcggerian perspective, rationality, judged historically, is only a series of prejudices that make up a worldview. When the reader encounters a text-legal, philosophical, literary, or whatever3 I Hermeneutics and Historicism 91 from another historical period, she can interpret it only in function of her own historical understanding as to what a valid interpretation might be.

This theory itself is a product of history. Thus, interpretation, or hermeneutics, is an act in which one historically limited worldview encounters another. Or, as Gadamer says, one set of prejudices tries to enter the closed circle of another set Prejudice is not to be understood as something negative: we all share a worldview, given in language, that sets forth axioms, in which we have no ultimate reason to believe except that these beliefs already make up our historical worldview. So we believe them because we believe them. Or, more elegantly, in "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Method," Gadamcr says we arc born into a world that is "already interpreted, already organized in its basic relations," and these are set forth primarily in language. s In the wake of Heidegger, hermeneutic circularity is the essence of belief and knowledge. We know our tradition, our world, our concept of interpretation because they are given

in language. This circularity has undoubtedly been in part responsible for the development of various theories, in Germany and the United States, that make of the reader, not the text, the locus of meaning, for it is quite logical, given these assumptions, to argue that meaning is always already given by the interpretive procedures that we have at our disposition at any given moment. Gadamer does not quite argue in this way, though in Truth and Method he argues that written texts arc animated by an intention and that the intended reader is an "ideality"-by which he means, I think, that texts are always carrying far more meaning than any single intended reader might be assumed to understand. Thus the total reader, capable of responding to the infinite meanings of the text, occupies a kind of ideal position that approaches asymptotically some interpretive space wherein the totality of meanings might lie. Gadamer' s concessions point to problems.

Gadamer's historicism is persuasive in its tautological coherence but, logically, is askew. By definition we all live in time. That is part of the meaning of the verb "to live." (Time is part of any definition of bios.) Yet, somehow meanings do survive the mortals who use them. Time is not logically part of meaning. It involves no contradiction to argue that one can or even must define meaning without any recourse to time. Plato got around history, after all, though that entailed inventing metaphysics.

And Gadamer hardly escapes metaphysics, for, in confronting the obvious problem that meanings last through time, he is obliged to admit that writing is the abstract ideality of language9 (something which sounds much like Derrida's "trace," that nonideal ideality through which difference works). Gadamer wants to have his cake and eat it too, for he wants to argue for the history-bound nature of interpretation and yet find a transcendental dimension to

culture. Written texts transcend history, and this transcendence allows him to speak of tradition and traditiongranted authority. Empirical evidence imposes the recognition that meanings perdure in time. Gadamer's logical difficulties probably mean that the whole hermeneutic project has been miscast, especially insofar as it relies on the tautological identification of history and meaning.

These problems recur in Michel Foucault, a theorist of greater importance for historicism in the United States. Unlike Gadamer, however, Foucault embraces a historicism that recognizes neither tradition nor the legitimacy of any authority and that thus avoids the problem of explaining the historical transcendence of meaning. But politics more than logic explains why Foucault has had an important role in the elaboration of theory in the universities. Clearly, his radical historicism has appealed to intellectuals who, recognizing the end of orthodox Marxism, want a model for utopian thinking that is not tainted by the gulag. Foucault's works cut in two directions. They are models for a historicism that at once denies that the individual subject has political responsibility; but at the same time these works implicitly demand the creation of a utopian state that would end the oppression that signifying practices and discourse work upon us. By working with texts and laying bare epistemic structures and codifications of power, the historicist can give herself the impression of working at the transformation of culture. Politics can be done in the library. Foucault was, with good reason, never satisfied with his work, for each new book brought with it the problem of defining how he, and not merely language, spoke. And the irrationalist had to confront constantly the problem of finding a locus from which something other than the real might speak. Utopia is never more than implied in Foucault's work, and

undoubtedly for the good reason that historicism allows no grounds for an ethical discourse.

Foucault began as a Marxist, but Heidegger's work showed the young philosopher that there is no underlying ahistorical truth about human beings. This discovery implied that it is not possible to speak of mental illness, personality, and psychology as if these notions had an objective reference independent of the practices that give them meaning. Mental illness is as much a cultural construct as the medical science that purports to analyze it. In hermeneutic terms, Foucault theorized that historical practices, as defined by a cultural matrix, are what gives any construct such as madness or personality its meaning. Historically determined definition is everything: all cultural practices are what they are defined to be through the workings of epistemic structures defined by history.

Culture is a great oppressive tautology. The task of Foucault's r archeologist and, later, of Foucault's genealogist of culture is to show what those oppressive definitions were and are. Perhaps more difficult, as Foucault knew, is the theorist's task to escape from her own historicity; she must show that the archeologist's definitions of madness or sexuality or linguistics are those of the past, and not those of contemporary culture.

In other words, we must guard against projecting our own historically determined rationality on the past and thereby constructing precursors that arc justifications for our own groundless constructs.

In Michel Foucault's Archeology of Scientific Reason, Gary Gutting has argued that Foucault was greatly influenced by the philosophy of science elaborated by Gaston Bachelard. The influence of philosophers of science on literary theory is

usually superficial. Needing some quick epistemological support, literary theorists arc usually quick to cite philosophers whose theories undercut any ultimate ground for scientific rationality. theories such as those of Feycrabend and Kuhn. However, Bachclard was a rationalist for whom mathematics is the crown of human thought-along with poetry. His rationalist model for scientific inquiry offers, moreover, parallels with Heidegger's model of circular hermeneutics.

In works like Le nouvel esprit scientifique (1934), Bachelard proposes that scientific observation is based on a theoretical "preunderstanding" of the object. Theories orient viewing. Thus, Bachelard allows one to argue that, historically, rational models precede the discovery of scientific objects; or, as Gutting argues the case, "contrary to a widespread empiricist misconception, it is (theoretical) ideas rather than sense experiences that give us objects in their full concreteness."10 The history of scientific research indicates that sometimes, though not always, successful theories orient us toward experience in ways that would be inconceivable without the theory. Foucault, like many literary theorists who usually go beyond him, makes even stronger claims for the historical role of theory. Foucault started out with the belief that discourse in some sense articulates experience, and that theoretical models or epistemological structures determine vision. At one time, Foucault seemed to believe that vision is the only foundation of these structures. But the belief that theory or epistemic structures determine vision is not an axiomatic proposition; and it should be proved. Without some proof, the proposition about epistemic models is being used as a tautological proposition: experience is what it is, or what it is said to be.

And what it is said to be is what it is, or what is seen. Foucault never resolves the problem of demonstrating this somewhat equivocal thesis.

His work never resolves the dilemma of how to articulate the relation between what can be seen to be the case and what is said to be so, for it is not true that they are necessarily the same.

Philosopher and friend Gilles Deleuze thought that this problem was the basic one that animated Foucault's work. In Deleuze's opinion, each new book by Foucault increasingly shows the gap between historically given propositions----0r what can be said-and what can be seen. Deleuze gives a nice twist to Foucault's determinism: "Ce que Foucault attend de l'Histoire, c'est cette determination des visibles et des enorn;;ables a chaque epoque, qui depasse les comportements et les mentalites, les idees, puisqu'elle les rend possibles" [What Foucault expects from History is the determination of what can be seen and what can be enunciated during each era, something which goes beyond a history of ideas or mentalities, since this determination is what makes them possible].11 Rather than Bachelard, however, it seems to be Heidegger's influence that leads to the belief in a determination or a necessity that lies beyond what seems empirically evident. Beyond beings, Being; or, for Foucault, beyond history, the Determination.

Foucault began his career with the presupposition that if something can be seen-say, different tissues of the body-then there must be a different discourse that allows something not seen before to become visible-or even to create what is seen-such as the science of histology that the French doctor Bichat developed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Foucault was then tempted to tum an observation, taken from the history of science, into a kind of

law, much like a tautology, to the effect that what is said is seen because it is is said. This law in turn finds its foundations in the historist tautology that what is, is said (historically), and what is said, is. Foucault's historicism is much like a static version of Hegel as far as necessity goes, for there is no dialectical necessity leading from one historical moment to the next.

What I have just described applies especially to an early work like The Birth of the Clinic, in which Foucault wanted to demonstrate that a different medical "gaze" comes into existence with the birth of histology.

The power of vision-le regard-becomes an interpretive concept tied to epistemological shifts. Le regard sees what is said, and what is said is what it sees. If Foucault abandoned concern with the "gaze" in later books, his historicism remained largely intact, though his final history of sexuality reads like a compendium of classical views, apparently to demonstrate that what is, is what could be said about the use of pleasures-but with no concern about how historical discourses on sex might articulate some antecedent vision that grounds discourse. But this later "hermeneutics of self' dealing with sex is rather much a failure to articulate the way in which discourse articulates our worldview.

Foucault began his career with a rejection of mere exegesis as a meaningful activity, perhaps to avoid some of Heidegger's worst confusions. The rejection of exegesis is set forth as a manifesto in Foucault's first published lines, his introduction to Binswanger's Dream and Existence. The introduction reverberates with a belated romantic belief in the autonomy of discursive systems that Foucault basically maintained throughout his life. Refusing, rather perversely, to retrace Binswanger's path in his introduction to Binswanger's work, Foucault contents himself with a

disdainful remark: "Original forms of thought are their own introduction: their history is the only kind of exegesis that they permit, and their destiny, the only kind of critique." 12 In his manifesto, Foucault seems to speak for a generation for whom the failure of history to bring about redemption brought about an even greater faith in the power of historical texts to determine historical practices or, in confusion, to hope that changing textual practices might change history.

This faith lies behind Foucault's belief in the autonomy of textual practices and epistemological structures. This autonomy means that epistemological practices can only be understood from within, in terms of the circle that Heidegger described. Foucault rejects exegesis, for exegesis imposes the obligation to relate forms of thought to exterior structures that make of these forms relata. In short, exegesis forces texts to submit to the dependency of a relation. Structuralism's later appeal for Foucault is clear at the outset of his career, for structuralism's belief that language is an autonomous, signifying structure coincides with Foucault's desire to believe in the autonomous power of tautologies to articulate reality. Foucault found in both structuralism and Heidegger versions of the idea that meaning is based on difference. It is important to see that for Foucault's historicism, difference, contained within the autonomous realm of language, is a source of history. In Foucault's work, as in Heidegger's, the concept of difference is used to buttress the argument for the autonomy of discourse. For, if discourse-language-is not subject to external constraints, if all articulations of reality are imposed by language, then clearly the only source of historical meaning can be from within language's system of articulations. This is the structuralist credo, but, in Foucault's work, it is an axiom that also argues for the idea that language detern1ines historical practices.

This credo is clearly formulated in Foucault's preface to The Birth of the Clinic (1963), in which he asks if it is not possible to undertake discourse analysis that would avoid the "fatality of commentary": "One would have to treat discursive facts, not as autonomous kernels of multiple meanings, but as events and functional segments, that by degrees come to form a system."13 And, pursuing the idea that systems generate meaning by the system of differences they encode, Foucault concludes that the proposition is the basic unit of discourse for a discursive practice. This follows from the way a proposition's meaning is not found stored away as some treasure but exists in the "difference that articulates it against other possible or real propositions that are contemporary with it, or to which the proposition stands in opposition in terms of linear temporal seriality" (xiii). Exegesis and commentary, on the other hand, introduce all kinds of disparate relations, including the relation of sameness, in order to produce meaning. Commentary is antisystematic, and a rigorous doctrine of difference cannot use the eclecticism of exegetic wondering and wandering.

In much of Foucault's thought, then, systemic difference is the motor force empowering discourse. If an object of inquiry has meaning, it is because it is at once itself and not the other. However, this means that the other has been, in Foucault's terms, oppressed or displaced. A system of thought imposes itself by eliminating opposing systems from the historical stage. I cannot believe that the world is round and flat at the same time. So, if I accept the roundness of the world and all the propositions imposed by that belief, then I must repress the systems that would allow the world to stand solidly there in all its flatness-unless I am a member of a culture that has not enshrined logic as the ultimate judge for the acceptability of propositions. From this curious perspective, logic appears to be the ultimate oppressor of differences. There is a kind of pseudologic at work in

Foucault's thought, or rather a selective logic working to abet Foucault's anger that rejects, for ethical reasons, Western culture as it is today. In anger, then, Foucault wants the oppressed Other to prevail: dreams over the real, madness over rationality, the noncodified over the codified. So his ethics presses A and -A, the basic tautological principle, into service in order to valorize the negated half.

Madness is other than reason, and, conversely, reason is other than madness, by definition. Foucault uses this either/or tautology as the fundamental axiom of a work like Madness and Civilization (as the greatly truncated version of Folie et deraison is called in English).

Foucault orchestrates a great wealth of empirical information to show that the opposition of reason and unreason is historically determined--0r determine history-the difference is not clear. Foucault's history of madness does make some historical claims that are amenable of empirical confirmation; and he is often wrong when facts get in the way of the systemic play of A and -A. For example, there is no reason to believe that madhouses came to replace leper colonies as the place where, as Foucault describes it, the Other was garnered and held at bay; nor is there evidence to suggest that the mad wandered freely about late medieval Europe in ships, as Foucault asserts in "proof' that medieval reason could accommodate itself with madness. Foucault's strategy is fairly obvious in this book: he wants to find a world in which revelation of the oppressed Other once took place. To this end, he invents a vision of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in which the "truth" of madness stood on a par with reason. Or, according to the spatial metaphor Foucault used in rewriting the last chapter of Mental Illness and Psychology, in the late Middle Ages the invasion of the insane "places the Other world on the same level as this one, and on ground level, as it werc." 14 With the break

between reason and unreason, with the break between these opposing forms of the same tautological principle, appears the codified opposition of reason and unreason, logic and illogic, that orchestrates the history of rationality from the Enlightenment to the present. The principle exists codified today, medically, after medicine invented mental illness to oppose mental health.

The tautological opposition of madness and reason has been pressed into the service of literary theory, in part because Foucault invites this use by granting literature a special place in overcoming this opposition.

Literature is in fact a special discourse lying beyond this opposition. But the attention Foucault's work has received in theory may also be explained by the oppositions that he uses with such skill. By way of slight digression, I add that the use of tautological oppositions seems endemic to the history of literary theory. Foucault's use of oppositions that are universal in their scope recalls the very beginnings of theory in Greco-Roman thought. For Horace or the Longinus of On the Sublime, the tautological opposition of nature and art could suffice to order all aesthetic activity, for whatever was one was not the other, and vice versa.

Foucault's historicism wants to break with this traditional ontology based on a substantialist metaphysics. But, in its attempt to demystify the hold that metaphysics has on our minds, historicism dissolves substantialist metaphysics into a series of identities that must by definition determine (or be determined by) history. Historically or otherwise, it is not clear to me that it is progress to substitute historical tautologies for tautological metaphysics.

Progress is another taboo notion for contemporary historicism, which paradoxically places modern historicism

on the side of the ahistorical Ancients in the seventeenth-century quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns. Foucault's historicism-and it can exemplify much of the nonMarxist historicism at work in the academy today---Oenies progress. The belief in progress presupposes some kind of transhistorical criteria as a basis for a rationality capable of judging objectively what progress is.

And evocations of progress appear suspicious to our contemporaries, who immediately ask: Progress toward what? Apparently, no telos is above suspicion. If all systemic thought is based upon the irrational victory of tautologies, then there are no criteria by which progress might be judged. We should be Nietzschians one and all-which was increasingly Foucault's perspective during his lifetime. However, there is a double standard at work in this rejection of historically situated rationality, for if most historicists are willing to subject science and rationality to a Nietzschian standard of truth, most are not willing to do so in the realm of ethics and politics. Few historicists, including Foucault, would be willing to suggest that slavery was and thus could be a good institution, or that the oppression of women was part of an acceptable scheme of things. And if we are willing to allow "progress" in the domain of ethics and politics, if it is progress to reject racism and sexism, then we have accepted the possibility of defending the validity of our criteria for belief and knowledge, not only for value judgments but for questions of knowledge in general. (Nietzsche's rejection of truth must be accepted or rejected in toto; and those of us who would not relish the idea of being slaves will probably opt for the latter point of view.) Foucault's vision of history held and still holds great sway over some of the best minds in the academy. There is a kind of tragic grandeur in the idea that systems of thought triumph, and as the episteme undergoes irrational changes, then the individual subject is transformed by currents of

historical change for which there is no explanation, except that history, like tragic fate, has so decreed it. The god of tragedy was Dionysus, and there is a Bacchic appeal to the vision of the irrational ruptures that are the most consistent feature of our intellectual history. For all its sober empirical investigation, Foucault's The Order of Things contains the most powerful exposition of this rather Nietzschian view. Though Foucault set out in this book to analyze three sciences-linguistics, biology, and economics-the implications for this scheme of thought are global, as Foucault recognized in his subsequent self-defense in his Archeology of Knowledge.

For the literary theorist, the promised land of a theory of discourse analysis seems almost within reach in The Order of Things. The only problem is that Foucault's analysis docs not directly apply to literary history. But the suggestion is clear: every discourse is characterized by periods during which a practice holds sway and, then, for no discernible reason, is overturned: "cela bascule." The discourse is discarded and a new epistemic system replaces it, for reasons as arbitrary as the reasons that justified the previous systems used to explain life, trade, and language. Suddenly, we confront biology, economics, and linguisticsnames that inscribe their modern nature within them. Foucault's analyses are in part convincing, in part selective, and, in any case apply only to the , sciences in question. Other sciences, say, mathematics or medicine, or discourses like music and art, have quite different types of history, often histories characterized more by continuity than by rupture, more by proliferation than by displacement. (What successful mathematical theorem has ever been abandoned?) Specifically, the history of literary discourse and of literary theory is as much characterized by remarkable periods of continuity as by ruptures, not to mention reprises. It is incumbent upon Foucault's disciples to explain how retrograde literature professors can still be

Aristotelians-and as far as that goes, how a very contemporary physicist, as Roger Penrose most eloquently demonstrates in The Emperor's New Mind, can be a Platonist.

It is not any specific definition of literary discourse that puts The Order of Things on the reading lists, for its major appeal is its critique of the humanist belief that the self is the repository of values and is the origin of discourse. And this strikes at the heart of traditional literary theory. Foucault's version of the autonomy of discourse entails the rejection of the individual self as the locus for any origination of discourse. Much like the Lacanian subject or Heidegger's das Man-the everyday subject of inauthentic discourse-Foucault's subject is spoken by language in the form of the epistemic structures making up the subject's worldview. Though there is no mechanical causality in Foucault's vision of change, his historicism transforms the subject into an object of historical determination. The "self' is simply a historically defined position in discourse, and the discourse that defines what the self is, is beyond any individual's power to change it.

After language and discourse, Foucault offers the theory that power is the agency that constitutes the historical self that speaks us all. Leroy Searle maintains that Foucault's concept of "power" is a prolongation of his theory of discourse, and, I would add, shows his continuing reliance upon Heidegger's concept of das Man. Searle says concisely: "As 'power' then becomes a kind of field phenomenon, the episteme appears to operate as a virtual subject, accountable to no one while seeming to account for everything." 15 For this essentially tautological analysis of power, sociologist Jean Baudrillard wrote a little book whose title tells us to Oublier Foucault. Before we "Forget Foucault," it is important, for an understanding of Foucault's influence today, to see that in

later works Foucault continues to set up models that identify the subject with discourse. It is of nugatory interest, then, to define discourse as power, or power as whatever interests the theorist. (The Black Panthers knew more about power when they said it flows out of the barrel of a gun.) Of greater interest is the way this definition then allows the literary theorist to define the subject as dependent on discourse for expression. The subject is a "function," and by making the author an appendage to discourse, the relation between the self and the literary text loses theoretical interest, as every English major knows from Foucault's widely anthologized essay "What is an Author." In reducing the subject to a function, a point in discourse determined by power, Foucault offers literary theory a positive contribution, as it were, by redefining the function of the author. In this transformation that abolishes the humanist writer, Foucault subscribes to the usual postmodern attack on humanist values that see in the author a repository for values and traditions that somehow limit our historical possibilities.

Foucault is perhaps unique, however, in asserting that, in the modern economy of discourse, the primary function of the author is to limit the possible meanings of the text. Reversing the dictum that would see an indefinite number of meanings in the texts, indefinite precisely because the author is not aware of all that she expresses in writing, Foucault paradoxically maintains that the function of the author is to eliminate excess. Another tautology is at work here. Either an author does or does not give meaning to a text. Foucault follows his usual strategy and affirms the negation of the received principle, and, with brio, proclaims that the author limits the meaning of the text. The play of tautological reasoning is clear, though the hyperbolic affirmation of the negative hardly offers one much when it comes to reading real texts in real, historical contexts.

Foucault's discourse analysis says that the author is an institution whose historical reality is to act as a kind of barrier established to limit the free circulation of meanings. Foucault again opens himself to the charge that empirical facts don't support his theory. Texts, literary texts, Foucault claims, once circulated without authorial attribution. Many medieval works circulated anonymously. But medieval works hardly reveled in more freedom of meaning than do, say, bourgeois novels to which authors, for obvious capitalist reasons, are zealous to see their names attached. Medieval procedures of interpretation prescribed the limits of the meaning of texts. These procedures were far more restrictive than the mere presence of an author's name, for the final allegorical meanings were prescribed in advance. Foucault's historicism on this point seems capriciously ahistorical, making of the author some rationalist principle that conspires, with capitalist ideology, to restrict the free play of utopian creativity. Beyond history, Foucault dreams of a text that could mean everything, or at least have meanings we have never dreamed of in our fall from grace. Alas, the history of literature is in part a history of principles of interpretation. Are these all to be taken as limiting conventions that conspire against freedom? If one can argue that literature emerges in the West (and in China) with the creation of an author, with Homer (and Confucius), then literature uses, from the beginning, the "author" as a principle of unity that allows the construction of meaning. The author has been a recurrent principle that has allowed literature to exist as dialogue and pedagogy, which is to say, a principle creating and conserving meaning. As one-time structuralist Gerard Genette said in a different context, historicism is often the death of history. 16 To recapitulate, then. my critique of Foucault has been concerned less with his specific views on madness, histology, prisons, or sexuality than with the tautological conceptual framework that underwrites his radical historicism. This type of

historicism has been the springboard to many activities besides literary theory, and much of the misguided side of multicultural and ethnic studies, women's studies, and canon revision is indebted to Foucault's confusions or facsimiles thereof. Foucault's readings have been taken to mean, in a simple-minded way, that history essentially shows that everything is the same because nothing has a rational foundation. Perhaps this is not too surprising a result when one tries to use right-wing thinkers like Nietzsche and Heidegger to promote utopian desires. From my discussion of Foucault, it could also be expected that historicist relativism should eventuate in cynicism about truth, though that cynicism is usually selective. The critique of truth is selectively directed against institutions like science that cannot be directly impressed into utopian goals. This historicism is motivated by a quest for that utopian locus in which an illuminating transcendence might be found offering truth beyond the oppressive structures of history. In Foucault's works, dreams, madness, and literature are called upon to fill this role.

Expositors of Foucault's thought draw back from accentuating this thirst for transcendence, though utopian hope is the only justification of the "subversive" side that theorists like Foucault attribute to their thought.

The skeptical critic may suggest that the frequent call for subversion reflects tautological thought in the service of pious outrage. Foucault and his followers' desire to negate what is by affirming what is not is supposedly a form of subversion, though this "subversion" seems to be an almost mechanical procedure of utopian thought. Affirming -A over A springs perhaps from a religious need to deny value to the untidy world we live in. Unfortunately, Foucault's utopian strain seems to have slowly tempered, for it is difficult to detect his rage to negate in the muted em - dition of The

Use of Pleasure or The Care of the Self, the last tomes of his History of Sexuality. I say unfortunately because it was the muted anger that often made Foucault most outrageous, which is to say, interesting.

It is worthwhile to trace out briefly the utopian desire underlying Foucault's views, for, like not quite extinguished fires, these desires and kindred hopes smolder throughout the university today. His views of literature first burst forth in impassioned terms in the introduction to Binswanger' s Dream and Existence. The conceptual energy that Foucault put forth in this critique of Freud is part of a defense of utopian thought.

With romantic fervor, he proclaims that dream is the source of the imagination, and that all acts of the imagination are dependent upon dream-sources. Dream is a source of transcendence with regard to the empirical world of images. Having defined dreams as transcendence, Foucault then expands this definition: dreams arc the source in which the "truth of the world" (47) anticipates itself: The dream, like every imaginary experience, is an anthropological index of transcendence; and in this transcendence it announces the world to man by making itself into a world, and by giving itself the species of light, fire, water, and darkness. (49) In later works, madness and literature--0r rather Literature-have the same role, which is to negate what is and to announce Truth. A complete anthropology describing how Truth comes into existence inevitably leads Foucault to literature, for literature has its origins in the Imaginary grounded in dream. A sometimes existential theorist, Foucault defines literary genres in terms of situated human existence: epic is created by the horizontal axis of human existence, by movement away; tragedy by the vertical axis, or movement up and down; and lyric by the lack of motion, in exile, at the point of intersection of the other genres.

These a priori exercises in poetics, defining genre in terms of Cartesian coordinates, are quite lyrical and point up the seriousness with which young Foucault wanted to decree the imaginary to be the source of Truth-a term left largely undefined, then and later.

In the History of Madness, the role of originator of the world's Truth devolves upon madness, a rather untenable position that nonetheless was well received during the revolt against institutional authority of the 1960s and 1970s. Finding truth in madness is consonant with finding the origins of transcendence in dream, for it is a romantic commonplace that identifies madness with drcan1-and by implication with literature. This all points up a unity in Foucault's developing thought. In Foucault's most impressive book, The Order of Things, literature is finally granted the utopian role of transcending those epistemic structures that determine how we think or even that we think. In demonstrating the irrational ruptures that characterize the development of regional sciences, Foucault ,.

introduces literature as a foil to the arbitrary changes that bring about a new economy of discourse. Literature, like dream, or perhaps more like medieval madness, is characterized as a discourse that wants to return to its origins as the "truth" of the world: Throughout the nineteenth century, and right until the present day-from lfolderlin to Mallarme, to Antonin Artaud-literature has only existed in its autonomy, it has detached itself from any other means of expression [langage J only by fonning a kind of "counter-discourse" and by thus retreating from the representative or signifying function of Jan~uage to find the raw being of language forgotten since the sixteenth century.1 This characterization describes a certain development of, mainly, French poetry, but as a general

definition of literature it has the singular deficiency of ignoring most of the texts we consider to be literature from Dickens and Balzac to the present day. Foucault is juggling definitions: he defines the Renaissance view of language as one not concerned with representation but rather with mimetic signatures (which in fact predates the Renaissance). And then he defines modern literature as having the same concerns as the Renaissance, which means that literature is once again the negation of the present, the negation of the rationality that would suppress the utopian truth of the Other. There is no dialectical progress in his presentation of theses and their negation, of definitions and counterdefinitions, all of which are orchestrated with great erudition and finally a poetic sense that things should be other than they are. The sensitive reader can hardly fail to agree with Foucault on the latter point, but, historicism for historicism, Heidegger's unsettling meditations on meanings arc more useful than Foucault's arrogant erudition that cannot situate its own historicity. But Foucault's imagination was a prisoner of a tautology: things are either located in time or they aren't. Captive of utopian vision, Foucault failed to recognize that historicity is a necessary and hence trivial condition of discourse. Neither literature nor theories about literature escape the necessity of being written in time. That literature is either determined by history, or it isn't, is not therefore an especially useful tautology. History is a bit more complex than that, though it is clear that the necessity of appearing in time is not a form of causal necessity, nor, in itself, does it say anything about what appears.

One of the paradoxes of history is also that it can spawn such ahistorical practices of the Humpty Dumpty principle as structuralism and poststructuralism, theories that we shall now adumbrate and that will help make further sense of Foucault's own complex simplicities.

Structuralism

If structuralism once seemed to be the basis for the most coherent theory about literature, the impression undoubtedly came from the fact that structuralist thought developed a more systematic set of a priori categories than any other literary theory. In its applications as semiotics or semiology-synonyms for all practical purposes-structuralism appears more directly concerned with literature than are Marxism, psychoanalysis, or historicism, theories in the service of ideological worldviews for which literature is a secondary matter. Structuralism proposes to be the science of communication. To this end, the various structuralisms have elaborated a priori definitions that, with no tentativeness, purport to order and describe the nature of language and of all "systems" that can be reduced to language. These systems include most products of the human mind, including literature, myths, paraliteratures, and all forms of communication.

Thus, structuralism treats literature as one of the objects of its inquiry, and literary semiotics is an established academic discipline.

But it is important to see that structuralism is rooted in the more ambitious project of explaining all sign systems, which ultimately means all of human culture. For, with a definition of" language that transforms all culture into sign systems, semiotics has wanted to be another totalizing science constructing a world in which everything that has meaning relates by definition to everything that has meaning.

The master tautology that has enabled semioticians to apply structuralism to everything is the following: whatever has meaning has meaning.

Or, to expand this logical definition so that it appears to have empirical content, the semiotician says that whatever has meaning must be a language, for there is no meaning without language. Thus, everything that has meaning, has meaning as it can ultimately be expressed through, or mediated by, a linguistic system. That language has meaning is read 104 r 4 I Structuralism 105 conversely that all meaning is language. Therefore, a science of signs must be coextensive with a science of language, and that science is found in the concepts of structuralist linguistics. A science of signs must rely on a science of language, since language mediates all meaning, and this by definition. The challenge to the skeptical critic is to try to describe meaning without saying what she means. As Umberto Eco phrases it, "Not only every human experience but also every content expressed by means of other semiotic devices can be translated into the terms of verbal language, while the contrary is not true."[1] To which the Zen Buddhist, the positivist, and the ordinary skeptic can retort that it involves no contradiction to say that what one means cannot be captured by language.

The structuralist tautology is therefore dubious. and one can legitimately ask that semioticians show that the concepts of structuralist thought are at work in all "systems" of meaning--or, more critically, even that a system is at work at all in the production of meaning.

The science of language that offers the conceptual model for structuralism was first developed in the Course in General Linguistics, as has come to be called a series of lectures by the early twentieth-century linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. (Saussure's lectures were edited by his students and received a title from their editors.) A critique of the problems that Saussure's lectures pose is necessary for an understanding of semiotics.

A generation of students of literary theory, if not linguistics, has grown up learning the categories of Saussure's course in linguistics as if they were dogma. It is worthwhile to dwell on a few points that suggest why structuralism, in spite of its pervasive influence, did not become the dominant school of literary studies. To be sure, structuralist vocabulary has become part of the language of literary studies. It can be quite useful.

But structuralism in any elaborate form has by and large failed. We continue to pay homage to theoretical notions of structuralism, butfortunately perhaps-most of us limit our attempts at applying structuralist theories to passing nods to and occasional borrowings from Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Jakobson, Barthes, Greimas, and others of lesser note. And this is not merely because of the enormous ennui that most full-blown structuralist attempts at explanation provoke. Structuralist definitions of how literary texts work are generally wrong-minded or work at such a level of a priori generality as to be of no possible interest for an understanding of how a specific literary work has meaning. Moreover, many extrapolations from structuralist linguistics to literature are arbitrary when not erroneous. Given all this, it may appear difficult to imagine why, not so very long ago, structuralism seemed ready to transform literary studies and the other "human sciences." Surely the recurrent dream of finding a totalizing theory of culture again played a role.

From Saussure to the present, the basis for structuralist thought has been the totalizing axiom that all signifying practices-language, poems, stop signs, fur coats, menus-embody a signifying system. The signifying system is complete at any given moment in time, even if systems change through time. Languages have histories, and so do literature, fashion, and cuisine-all forms of signification, at

least according to Roland Barthes, once the most influential semiotician and literary structuralist.

All that is human is system. It is worth asking, How did any thinker ever come up with such an idea? Reacting against the nineteen century's exclusive interest in historical linguistics, Saussure rejected the idea that the only proper study of language was the study of philological change. (Actually, Saussure preferred philology, and his development of linguistic theory was motivated by the desire to give philology a well-grounded understanding of the nature of language.) It was in reaction against the historicism that could only view language in terms of change that Saussure defined language as a systematic whole that at any given moment is complete unto itself. This seems analytically truth. However, the next step is problematic. Saussure says that the linguistic system is always separate from any given instance of language use. The system manifests itself in individual speech utterances (la parole) but is not to be identified with them. The system stands behind the individual speech acts much like a transcendent mechanism permitting manifestations of the system when individuals open their mouth and make use of the system. The proper object of linguistic study is, therefore, not the individual's utilization of the language code but the postulated system that permits that speech act in the first place.

A later version of this methodology is developed in the following terms by the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev in his Prolegomena to a Theory of Language: A priori it would seem to be a generally valid thesis that for every process there is a corresponding system, by which the process can be analysed and described by means of a limited number of elements recurring in various combinations. Then, on the basis of this analysis, it should be possible to order these

elements into classes according to their possibilities of combination. 2 This is the structuralist credo. It is an a priori definition of how language should work. And if it is a scientific model, then it, like any other scientific model, should show its value by the empirical confirmation it receives in explaining language, poems, or stop signs, if not Dior dresses , 4 I Structuralism 107 and haute cuisine. But it is not clear how structuralists test their theorizing.

Structuralist confirmation of the model is to go from process to system. And this operation demands that one find a finite number of signifying units, combining according to definite rules, that go to make up the system. But the units can be defined only once the model is in place. It might appear that more effort goes into building a system than into verifying if the system accounts for anything; or that, since the system is a description of what is to be explained, by this circularity, the system must perforce always describe the process-since it is describing itself. The basic problem, as most contemporary linguistics recognizes, is to transform the definitions into testable hypotheses.

Before the theorist considers testing hypotheses about secondary semiotic systems, she must recognize that the primary systemlanguage- presents many problems for the structuralist methodology.

That language has meaning is a given. How is meaning explained? It is generally taken as axiomatic that one can identify individual signifying units in the sign system. For natural language, a "word" might be such a unit, though even that unit is not obvious, and one can propose units of signification that are smaller and larger than the word. In the case of other signifying systems, there has been even less agreement about what constitutes the minimal signifying unit that will recur in all combinations.

The problem is compounded in addition by the fact that language does not lend itself to some limited recursive procedure, like the genetics of a pea plant, that enables one, hopefully, to see if a finite number of combinations have been realized. Language can probably be described by an indefinite number of formalizations-which led Wittgenstein to propose his description of language as an open-ended series of language games.

In proposing to constrain description a priori by a limited combinatory system, working with atomic kernels of meaning, structuralism begins with a dubious proposition. This proposition works largely because structuralism seems to offer a model of how language might function and then proceeds to describe the model itself as if it were describing language in its concrete functioning.

Structuralists can reply to this critique that they are describing the model, since, from their viewpoint, the model is the system. The system is not to be confused with real language, even if the linguist's access to the system must perforce be through meaningful manifestations of real speech (or poems or stop signs). The system is a definition, but one that in some sense works. In what sense it works is another question. Pragmatically speaking, it works by describing language and by predicting what is a possible combination according to the system. However, in reality we only know the system by checking it against what we know by listening to native speakers. Linguistics from Saussure through Chomsky is thus a formalism that studies systems constrained finally by what we already know we can say. The hermeneutic circle appears inevitable: how do we know what we can say except by knowing what we can say.

Native speakers are the ultimate arbiters in what the scientist can knowand in most cases the investigators are

native speakers who already know what they want to know. This applies a fortiori to literary semioticians.

Language is defined as a system that manifests itself in concrete realizations, though the system is not to be taken as coincident with the utterances. A native speaker may be quite ignorant of the system postulated by the theorist. In itself, this is not an exceptional proposition, in that native speakers can be quite ignorant of the regularities they enact every time they obey a putative rule for language use. (Chinese was spoken for three thousand years without a felt need for a formal grammar.) Structuralism proposes something more than a grammar, however. It proposes to identify combinatory units that exist as minimal units of meaning that then combine according to arbitrary but necessary rules. And it is not clear that some of these atomic units exist anywhere except in a structuralist definition of a meaningful system.

The concept of system is in itself questionable on other grounds. The system changes in time but is complete at any given moment. This is tautological, for it is not clear what an incomplete system would be, except as a mere negation. The notion of a complete system appears to be something like an analytical concept, perhaps a totalizing concept that is operative by fiat. How could one prove that a linguistic system is incomplete-to then show what a complete system looks like? Was the system of English incomplete before chemistry was added to it? or genetics? or literary theory? Was it historically incomplete until these were added? Though the concept of complete system appears to be a tautology that has little application, let us provisionally accept that the system is by hypothesis complete, or closed in some sense. It must also have a social locus. The structuralist says that the linguistic system is embodied in a concrete social reality, but, as Derrida points out, the

postulated system seems to occupy a metaphysical location existing beyond material language and actual use. No single speaker embodies the complete system of the society's language, just as no single poet can exhaust all the possibilities of the "literary system" that derives from the linguistic system. Each speaker in the social group embodying the system is constrained at once by the rules that are embodied in the system, and is free to combine the units of the system-words, syntagms, or whatevcrin ways that apparently have never existed before. In principle, speakers have combinatory freedom, though in reality it seems that structuralists , 4 I Structuralism 109 reduce the degree of combinatory freedom to virtually nil. It is to be asked if speakers of the language usually voice precodified units-fixed syntagms---0r if they find combinations that their linguistic tribe never saw before. Consequently, do most writers merely recombine preexisting units of meaning, recycling, as it were, fixed signifying units? How can a speaker freely produce meaning if she is constrained by a system in the first place? The question as to combinatory freedom presupposes that speakers know what they are combining. For Saussure, the basic unit of meaning is the "linguistic sign," though as Saussure uses the notion, the sign is a dubious concept. The critic can ask why it should be assumed that meaning accrues to the sign-basically the word for Saussure-when it appears that meaning can be as much a function of units smaller and larger than the word-sign. Moreover, truth-values can hardly accrue to individual signs, nor can one do much with words in isolation. For this reason, much philosophy of language sees the sentence as the basic unit of meaning; or other philosophers, influenced by Wittgenstein, consider meaning to be a function of a word's place in a larger language game, involving an indefinite but nonetheless finite number of procedures and rules for determining when meaning occurs. By these strategies, analytic thinkers avoid the conceptual

absurdities encountered in structuralist and especially poststructuralist attempts to understand meaning in function of an individual word and its not being some other word. (Derridian "differance" of which I spoke earlier is also derivative from Saussure's awkward definitions limiting meaning to atomistic terms that somehow have meaning through their difference from all other single terms.) Other problems accrue when contemporary structuralists follow Saussure in studying the sign as the minimal signifying entity. To understand the sign, Saussure says it must be broken down by further analysis.

Saussure's linguistic sign is composed of a material signifier and an immaterial signified; or, in spoken language, of an "acoustic image" and a concept. This definition follows a traditional concept of the sign, one that emphasizes that a recurrent conceptual element or universal can be embodied in any number of material manifestations. Following Locke, Saussure says that the relation between the signified and the signifier is arbitrary. This relationship complicates the problem as to how to identify what constitutes the sign: what allows one to say that one is facing, in each instance, the same sign? Saussure proposes that the sign signifies only through its difference from other signs. Signs are thus identified through their position in the space of the linguistic system, which means through their opposition to and difference from other signs.

Difference has been a rallying cry, if not a cliche, in much recent literary theory, and structuralism, after Heidegger, obliges us again to deflate the hyperbolic claims made for this putative concept. How does one define difference? What constitutes difference? There are several ways to define difference. In the wake of Saussure, the following platitude, selected at random, has become the staple of structurally minded theories: The Saussurean insight that the sign has

meaning not in itself but in virtue of what is not. It takes on meaning in virtue of its contrast, the way it differs from other signs. The difference is what gives the marks of its distinction, and so its signification. 3 The way a sign differs from another sign is by not being the other sign. It seems hard to say much more than that about difference, though this quotation, reflecting Derrida's reading of Saussure, transforms difference into a philosophically active principle, going beyond what even Saussure made of difference in arguments that, I believe, were wrong-minded in the first place. Scholasticism, if not Humpty Dumpty, can be evoked as antecedents for the active philosophical principle.

The argument about difference is wrong-minded on several counts.

First, Saussure's argument about difference is based on a methodological leap of faith that consists in using phonology as a model for all higher levels of analysis of language (and the definition of difference quoted above also derives from a confusion of phonology and semantics). It is true that every language has a finite number of phonemes that can be defined differentially-as well as positively in terms of their acoustical structure. Theorists of literature have been unduly impressed by the fact that the d of "dog" differs from the b of "bog," and this means that one can differentiate the two words on the basis of differential traits.

Acoustics can also describe the d and b of the English phonemic systemic without recourse to difference, though linguistics today uses descriptive, distinctive features to describe sounds in ways that are less apparently amenable to mathematical description. To extrapolate from the analysis of phonemes in order to argue that the same kind of difference exists on the semantic level is unwarranted. I have no need to speak of an opposition between dog and

some other concept to understand what dog means; nor need I suppose that the concept exists in opposition to every other concept in the English language for us to identify it. Concepts come and go, but dog seems to be stable: it doggedly exists from decade to decade, no matter what concepts surround it. The structuralist confusion is to take a necessary but trivial condition-to wit, all signs are different from signs that are not the same signs-and then to convert "difference" r 4 I Structuralism 111 into a necessary and sufficient causal principle that can produce identity.

But phonology is not semantics, nor is it syntax; and it is meaningless to suppose an infinity of differences to grasp how language or any other signifying "system" functions.

The theoretical hyperbole inflating difference into an active principle leads some theorists to suppose that every conceivable difference that might exist is actualized in some sense when something is said. It is useful to contrast structuralist hyperbole with what anthropologist and information theorist Gregory Bateson says about difference for its relevance to information theory. He notes that information does depend upon perceived differences, for, by definition, if all were perceived to be the same, there would be none of the discriminations that go to make up information and meaning. However, this proposition cannot be used to argue that everything is difference. Difference is derived from positive entities that generate information only in contrast to other positive entities, or as Bateson argues: Difference, being of the nature of a relationship, is not located in time or in space. We say that the white spot is "there," "in the middle of the blackboard," the difference between the spot and the blackboard is not "there." It is not in the spot; it is not in the blackboard; it is not in the space between the board and the chalk …. Kant argued long ago that this piece of chalk contains a million potential facts (

Tatsachen) but that only a very few of these could become truly facts by affecting the behavior of entities capable of responding to facts. For Kant's Tatsachen, I would substitute differences and point out that the number of potential differences in this chalk is infinite but that very few of them become effective differences (i.e. items of information) in the mental process of any larger entity. Information consists of differences that make a difference.4 However, most differences don't make a difference, especially a linguistically significant difference.

Difference is hardly the only notion of Saussure's Course having implications for a theory of signification in literature. Literature is made of those signs that are the basic unit of signification for Saussure. Their material signifiers are identified on the basis of their difference from other material signifiers, and the concepts they embody are identified on the basis of opposition to other concepts. However well-motivated may be this attempt to define signs in a nonmetaphysical way, it is rather obvious that this dichotomy is meaningless when applied to the conceptual level. Saussure justifies his separation of signified and signifier by the fact that the relation between the signified and signifier is arbitrary.

The linguist Benveniste has pointed out that there is a confusion here, too, for what Saussure really means is that the relationship between sign and referent is arbitrary: dog, Hund, chien and cane can all have the same referent, but the relation of signifier and signified within the same language is arbitrary, if also absolute. So absolute, I would add, that one must wonder whether the dichotomous opposition of signified and signifier is of any interest at all, especially as long as one is working within the same natural language as one's frame of reference.

To describe the functioning of signs, Saussure says that they unfold along a horizontal linear axis, or at least spoken signs unfolding in time do. In structuralist analysis, time is characterized as a spatialized vector.

A key structuralist task is to identify signs as they recur along this axis in language-or however they unfold in systems not amenable to geometry.

Vertically, linguistic signifiers and signifieds are united, but horizontally they maintain a relation of opposition that Saussure calls value. Value is one of the least clear concepts Saussure bequeathed to structuralist thought. Value is apparently not the same as meaning. Meaning is the relation between the signifier and the signified. To show what value is, Saussure says that the French word mouton has the same meaning as the English word sheep but a different value since one does not eat sheep in English. Only mutton serves to designate English culinary fare. The example is unwarranted. Nothing allows this comparison, since in Saussure's terms two signs from different systems, such as mouton and sheep, cannot have the same signified. Only differences within each individual system of French and English allow definition of the signified.

Saussure's structuralist thought is probably incapable of explaining synonymy, though "value" is an attempt in that direction. When Saussure says that the French verbs redouter and craindre have the same valuethey mean "to fear"-he is talking about synonyms, though it is difficult to see how in his terms they have different values. Value should somehow work along the horizontal axis of the unfolding flow of signs, but nothing in Saussure's work really clarifies how this might occur in terms of the system. The economic metaphor of value suggests that two words with the same value can be exchanged, but this does not really

explain why we eat "mutton-chops" but not "sheep-chops." They don't have the same value? Basically, one must appeal to the native speaker and find out what the use is: "sheep-chops" are not a received item, though doubtlessly everyone knows what the term means. Or, as Frege might have put it, a "sheep-chop" has a sense or meaning (Sinn) but no use or reference (Bedeutung). After Saussure, of course, the term might also have the connotation of an item used for weird linguistic speculation.

Much structuralist thought after Saussure is motivated by his desire to 4 I Structuralism 113 translate systems into a set of geometric operations-whence the attempt to describe the distinction between meaning and value in terms of spatialized axes. The same axes describe the general spatialization of the language system, or the two axes of the system's functioning: the associative (or, today, paradigmatic) axis and the syntagmatic axis. As in a Cartesian coordinate system, the syntagmatic axis is the horizontal coordinate; the paradigmatic is the vertical coordinate. Going beyond the sign, Saussure saw larger combinations forming along the syntagmatic axis, where "words acquire relation, in virtue of their being chained together, based on the linear nature of language, which excluded the possibility of two elements being said at the same time."5 Saussure saw these "linear combinations" as precoded combinations, or syntagms, composed of two or more consecutive units; he gives such examples as "re-read," "God is good," or "if the weather is nice, we'll go out." On the basis of these examples, it seems as if practically all of human speech is already stored up in the system, precodified as great lumps of associative signs.

The belief that the system predetermines the possibilities of expression recurs, in one form or another, throughout modem theory. For the Heidegger of Being and Time, the

ordinary speaker is only a point at which speaks das man, the anonymous voice of inauthentic language. The ordinary speaker of fallen language merely repeats what the tribe has codified (or so dixit Beckett). Analogously, structuralists and poststructuralists proclaim, in order to demystify us all, that language speaks us, not the contrary (and in the unanimity of their clamorous repetition, they do seem to prove their point). For a theory of literature, one corollary of this belief is the idea that literature is already spoken, already codified somewhere else, and that texts are always intertexts recycling previous codifications. And in killing the concept, if not the person of the recycler sometimes known as the author, Barthes and Foucault make of the writer a space where a combinatory system enacts itself, without the writer knowing it. A little or a lot of psychoanalysis or Marx can be added to this formulation to come to the Lacanian conclusion that the symbolic system speaks us from our unconscious, be it individual or collective.

Embodying the system, mere mortals open their mouths and the tribe's codifications of meaning unfold along the syntagmatic axis. It is along this axis, as Saussure says in the Cours, that every term in the system, at every level of analysis, acquires value through its opposition to whatever precedes or what follows, or both (171). Using phonemes as his model, Saussure thus proceeds to identify words-morphemes today-and larger syntagms such as those quoted above. Intersecting this horizontal axis is the vertical order of relations. The vertical axis is set up outside of speech or actualized discourse. Difference engenders a Kantian monster on this axis: the vertical relation consists at each point along the horizontal axis of all the possible elements that might appear at that point. The vertical axis exists negatively, in abstentia, composed of all the elements not present, so that by not being present they exist in opposition to the element that is present. The vertical axis

forms a virtual opposition between what is actualized and everything that could have been actualized. According to Saussure, the meaning of any element derives from this virtual opposition, though it is quite difficult to see how this opposition sets up a meaningful difference. For example, when I say the syntagm "he sees," the pronoun "he" derives its meaning from its opposition to all the units-in traditional terms, all the nouns and pronouns that might have replaced "he." Practically every noun in the lexicon could appear there. Saussure tries to justify this unwieldy notion by a conceptual twist that consists in framing another definition: the locus of paradigmatic relations is the linguistic system, la langue, constituting "the inner storehouse that makes up the language of each speaker" (171). This is a Hegelian type of definition that defines the totality of what is as necessarily existing because, logically, all that is, is.

Perhaps the worst confusion in all this is that Saussure extrapolates from the closed combinatory system of phonology, with its finite number of phonemes. He derives, by analogy, a model for an equally closed combinatory system of signs, concepts, fixed syntagms, and the like. At the conceptual level, however, this "system" exists simply as a totalizing definition, with no reality whatsoever except that which accrues to definitions of the sort according to which a totality must exist since all that is, is. Therefore, there is always a totality of whatever is, be it in the world or in language. This is vacuous as a description of language, or of the actual production of speech. Saussure ends with an empty tautology when it comes to understanding how language might shape meaning.

Only a Hegelian might find some sense in paradigmatic oppositions insofar as he conceives the totality to be the locus of truth-which points to the reason why the poststructuralist Derrida, mimicking the Hegelian thought

he wants to deconstruct, could latch on to Saussure and the closed system, the totality of which is the locus of meaning. None of this is a very economical strategy for understanding how language functions.

In all fairness to Saussure, I admit that I have stressed the problematic side of Saussure's attempt to theorize language as a system (and elsewhere I have provided a less polemical account of how one might interpret the Course). 6 But, when attempting to understand much of what passed for the "structuralist revolution" of the 1960s and 1970s and the subsequent developments in literary theory and human sciences, one , 41 Structuralism 115 must have in mind the misleading analogies and empty tautologies. Our concern is now with the application of structuralist concepts to literary theory, and no more central or influential example can be cited than the work of the brilliant polymath Roland Barthes. With regard to literary semiotics, the Barthes of interest is the Barthes of the 1960s, who worked with great zeal to develop a general semiology and a structuralist poetics, before he decided, in his book S/Z, that the attempt to make all literary structures fit one mold was the equivalent of the Zen desire to see a landscape in a bean. However, as a the semiotician, Barthes wanted to do more or less just that: he wanted to find a universal science of signs that could account for the genesis of all literary communication as well as of all other sign systems. The Barthes who then underwent the influence of Lacan and Derrida became a poststructuralist, but the structuralist Barthes remains an emblematic thinker for the hopes semiotics once entertained, however much some linguists decried Barthes's interloping.

In his structuralist phase, Barthes declared he was responding to Saussure's call for a semiology, or a general theory of signs, of which linguistics, according to Saussure,

would be a regional science. Barthes decided, however, that linguistics, rather than being one province of this new science, had to be the master model for the entire discipline. This reversal is motivated by the tautological propositions we have seen that make all meaning the province of linguistics. The analytical truth that whatever has meaning has meaning entails the axiom "Every semiological system has its linguistic admixture."7 Barthes subscribes fully to the proposition that all meaning is linguistically mediated. And with this axiom, all the concepts of structuralist linguistics arc justified and taken over for formalizing the "system" underlying any production of meaning- in poems, fashion, or automobiles. Barthes was hardly alone in having recourse to linguistic concepts. Theorists of the media wanted to describe their semiotic systems. In the case of cinema, for example, this led to such abstruse questions as to whether the image, supposedly the atomistic or minimum unit of meaning in filmic discourse, was doubly articulated, like the word in spoken language. Barthes was never guilty of such naivete, but he did apply linguistic concepts with a literalism that seems implausible today. But Barthes had a gift for making conceptual transfers seem plausible. Having declared that semiology is part of linguistics, that the science of meaning is essentially the science of meaning, Barthes also invited all the human sciences to join in a great potpourri of semiotic research, establishing another precedent for our contemporary attempts to concoct interdisciplinary stews that mix Marxist sociology, historicism, and neo-Freudianism in order to serve up grand deductive feasts of interlocking tautologies.

Barthes's introductory The Elements of Semiology is a primer for research in how to describe the a priori system that generates the meanings found wherever meaning is found. Barthes's playfulness also led him to attempt to describe menus, automobiles, and fashion in terms of the

system underlying the meaning behind the unfolding of (French) meals, the symbolization of fenders, or the proper combinatory schema underlying the messages that beautiful models transmit in ads for Dior.

And there certainly can be a certain pedagogical interest in looking at, say, a building and trying to figure out what might be the minimum signifying unit in all the complicated volutes, cornices, bricks, and colors that one can discern; or what might be the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of bricks and windows. There can be a certain ludic interest in picking out a person in the street and in "reading" the syntagmatic flow of her or, perhaps less often, his clothes by analyzing the set of oppositions that, setting tennis shoes in opposition to patent-leather pumps, establishes the "meaning" of the vestimentary message. Messages surround us everywhere, and if difference is an inadequate way to read the symbolism of Cadillac fins or the mythic value of Garbo's face, Barthcs sensitized us to the messages of which we arc, metaphorically, native speakers without thinking about it. Susan Sontag caught the spirit of the hyperbolic goals Barthes set for himself when she wrote in her introduction to a collection of his work, "To stipulate that there is no meaning outside of language is to assert that there is meaning everywhere ."8 In strict terms, this is of course not true, though it has a nice tautological ring. For when the semiotician asserts that meaning is everywhere, she means that she finds language everywhere.

Before using Saussure's concepts to develop a full-blown semiology, Barthes selectively dabbled with linguistic concepts to make analyses of all manner of pop phenomena, usually to show the ideology encoded in the representation. For example, in "reading" the cover of the magazine Paris Match in one of the essays in Mythologies, Barthes proposes that the photographic image of a black colonial soldier

saluting the French flag has a double message, for it signifies a denotation and a connotation.

The denotative message is the literal iconic message, to wit, that a black colonial soldier is saluting the flag. The denotivc signifier and signified are taken over by a higher level of meaning, however, when the denotive message is then made to signify a second signifier, a connotative signifier, that might mean something like, "The Empire receives the salutations of all its happy peoples." Moreover, Barthes points out that the secondary signification is "naturalized" by the primary one: myth converts conventional meanings into nature, as he put it for a subsequent generation of theorists. One can rarely fault Barthes on his often 4 I Structuralism 117 perceptive interpretations of pop icons- though he is making an interpretation and not a "reading" in any normal sense. And this points up a problem. Not every "native speaker" of pop images will receive the message that Barthes finds in the image, even when we all agree about what is literally in the image. There are at least two reasons for this. First, connotations depend on a certain sensitivity to language and to its implicit code; but, secondly and more importantly, it is doubtful that images even have connotations in a linguistic sense. In the case of images of the world, there are an underdetermined number of so-called connotations--or really interpretations-that the sensitive viewer can find in the icon, depending on the interpretive framework the viewer brings to bear on the image. To make an image have a secondary meaning, the provider of the image must also supply the interpretive framework, as in art or advertising.

The originality of Mythologies lay in the semitechnical use of structuralist terminology to justify the formulations of a critical mind in revolt against the ideology of mass capitalism. It was, for Barthes's hermeneutics, the revolt

against this capitalist ideology that provided Barthes with his basic interpretive framework. Barthes later attempted to promote a more "scientific" structuralism. In his System of Fashion, this attempt led him to write his only labored book: the work was to be an academic thesis revealing the signifying system behind advertising and the messages encoded in dress. This sober, if not tedious, analysis of fashion messages also brought to light the intellectual poverty that has made most structuralist formalizations useless from a pragmatic viewpoint. Barthes formalizes in this long thesis what can be said, in one sentence, about the relation of connotations and images: dresses have iconic messages only when fashion "deciders" tell you what they mean.

Structuralism's intellectual poverty is less evident in Barthes's literary theory. Barthes's most brilliant exercises are his attempts to develop a theory of narrative. His formal semiotic description of narrative can serve as a model of what is most interesting and most problematic about structuralist literary theory. Especially relevant is his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" of 1966, an essay-length analysis of narrative that uses Barthes's semiotic model. This model tautology, if actually applied to any narrative of any complexity, would generate an indefinitely long description of the complexities involved in generating an indefinite number of meanings. From the outset, then, we should bear in mind that we are discussing here the program for producing an infinite text. Barthes' s "Introduction" is an exemplary product of the structuralist attempt to describe literary structures-brilliant, but ultimately of little use except to designate its own brilliance. Borges does much the same, though with greater wit.

A theory of narrative is a theory of one of the dominant structures of literature. But narratives are also a structure of

experience that has nothing to do with literature. Narratives organize experience through language-or with images, drawings, or in pantomime. Telling stories, narrating tales, or simply arranging events in some sequential order are ways of knowing experience. Barthes' s interest in the "Introduction" is to describe the necessary constraints that order narratives, any narrative, though fictional narratives are his primary interest. He wants essentially to describe the "system" that allows a fictional narrative to exist in language. What narratives are or can be is an empirical question, and contemporary poetics finds itself, in the wake of structuralism's failure to find the "grammar" of narratives, returning to historical research to find out what narratives can be in light of what they actually have been.

Barthes says this historical research is impossible, for there have been too many narratives in history for the theorist to study them all. Whence his desire to describe the a priori system of which any given narrative must be an embodiment. The idea that every story embodies a system is analogous to Saussure's proposition that every speech act is the manifestation of an underlying system, the system of the language in question. Semiology extrapolates its model from linguistics in order to describe structures that lie beyond the sentence, the sentence being the final level of linguistic analysis. To reach a higher level of integration, the semiotician theorizes that a narrative is a structure that integrates sentences according to its own system and levels of analysis. According to Barthes, analysis must be an a priori procedure. Each extrapolation, going from level to level of analysis, proceeds by logically defining what constitutes each level in terms of necessary features and constraints imposed from above.

In his "Introduction," Barthes is conscious of his methodological difficulties. Facing the indefinite number of

narratives history has produced, he affirms he must invent a deductive procedure that devises a hypothetical model of description whose system necessarily brings order to chaos. Semiology must work from the model to different narrative "species" in order to study narratives that conform to and deviate from the model: It is only at the level of these conformities and departures that analysis will be able to corne back to, but now equipped with a single descriptive tool, the plurality of narratives, to their historical, geographical and cultural diversity. 9 In this methodological credo, Barthes seems to want to respect empirical 4 I Structuralism 119 diversity; however, there is nothing in the essay that calls for testing the model, or indicates what might be the criteria for confirming or falsifying it. On the contrary, he plainly states that there is to be a single descriptive tool for all narratives, and that is all. And the tool is the model that analysis describes, creating a definition that the semiologist projects onto the world where, not too surprisingly, the semiologist finds it at work. In contemporary parlance, this is conceptualizing from the top down with a vengeance.

The model is constructed, like the linguistic system, by describing levels of organization, which to say, levels of analysis. The model also depends, like linguistic analysis, for knowledge of the system given from the top, since knowledge of meaning must guide analysis. However, analysis of the levels proceeds from the lowest level to the highest.

Barthes imitates the analysis of the linguistic system that goes from the simplest units of organization up to the most complex-from phonemic organization up through morphology, syntax, and onto the semantic high plateau where sentences exist. Beyond the sentence is the narrative, for which the first level of analysis is to define the smallest

narrative units of meaning (260). This semiotic procedure involves defining functional criteria by which to lay bare the elementary signifying "atoms" of tales and stories, lies and epics. Barthes defines the minimal unit of narrative signification by saying there are two types of minimal narrative events: functions and indices. When they are functions, narrated events operate "horizontally" to open sequences and to maintain narrative flow; whereas when events are indices, they function "vertically" to offer information that receives its meaning by integration into the next higher level.

Logically, there are two types of functions: those events that open sequences and close them, and those that don't, or the lesser events that fill up the sequence as catalyzers. Finding the minimal signifying unit means already determining the importance and role of some minimal event. This demands more than a mere retrospective determination.

Events must have intrinsic markers that show what they mean: some constitute real hinge points of the narrative (or of a fragment of the narrative); others merely "fill in" the narrative space separating the binge functions. Let us call the fonner cardinal functions (or nuclei) and the latter, having regard to their complementary nature, catalyzers. For a function to be cardinal, it is enough that the action to which it refers open (or continue, or close) an alternative that is of direct consequence for the subsequent development of the story, in short that it inaugurate or conclude an uncertainty. (265) The names are not essential, but what is at stake here is that Barthes wants to define units of signification that signify uni vocally and indicate how to "read" the narrative. Not surprisingly, he draws on a James Bond narrative for his major example, for the relative clarity of this pop narrative allows little interpretive latitude. But it does allow latitudenative speakers of pop culture can

disagree quite legitimately about what constitutes a cardinal function that opens a sequence and what constitutes catalyzing events that prolong the sequence. Does Bond's hopping into bed with a beautiful blond close a sequence or merely prolong one? The reader's understanding of what a sequence is determines what she "reads" as functions-this of course is from the top down, from the viewpoint of the reader who already has an interpretation of the narrative and the relative importance of events in the story. What other than this understanding of meaning allows the reader to identify a sequence? The very notion of a minimum unit of signification dissolves before our eyes, for we are obliged to look for patterns larger than the microevent to find something that will endow "minimal" units with meaning. The frame of reference we find in, or bring to, the text determines what we pick out as a function or a sequence. And the multiple possibilities for deciding what constitutes a unit of meaning show that there are no fixed criteria for meaning at this level beyond the sentence. There are no a priori rules at this higher level in spite of Barthes's seeming coherence in defining all events as either syntagmatic units or paradigmatic units. The tautology doesn't work when confronting the heterogeneous order of any narrative.

Or, as S. H. Olsen has put it in a spirited argument against structuralism, "There are no clear intuitions about the correct way to segment a literary work into minimal semantic units, no intuitions about what could be the set of minimal semantic units from which the 'signs' presumably constituting a particular work is taken, no conventionally determined intuitions about what relationships the semantic units constituting a literary work can enter into."10 Barthes is a victim of the same conceptual legerdemain as the structural linguist who must pretend not to know what words mean when analyzing a semantic segment. Literate native speakers all tend to agree as to what are the semantic

segments of a sentence, whereas the interpretation as to what constitutes a sequence in a narrative is nearly always open to debate. Barthes is a good reader. His clever reading of connotations is persuasive. But his determination of a function is not the same determination as the intuitive grasp of the minimal signifying unit that native speakers have when they know what a word in a sentence means---or when they know that it is a word. When Bond pours a shot of whiskey, Barthes may convince us momentarily that Chivas Regal is an r 4 I Structuralism 121 "index" of Bond's modernity, though a critic might retort that whiskey connotes modernity only for a Frenchman in the 1960s.

Events acting as indices are the second class of minimal units in narrative. Barthcs divides them into indices proper and informants; the latter are "pure data" serving to locate the narrative in time and space (267). Both must function vertically, so Barthes finds that informants, those "realist operators," refer to the highest level of discourse-which seems rather incoherent. Suppose that Bond drank his whiskey on 4 April. What has the date, that indicator of the real, to do with a higher level of discourse? Where does a "vertical" relation exist that integrates that detail into the higher level of narration dealing with the actual enunciation of the sentences composing the narration? The vertical or paradigmatic relation in literary theory is as unwieldy as it is in linguistics.

As in any semiotic system, narrative's functions and indices obey combinatory rules, or a syntax. Barthes considers three possible hypotheses about narrative syntax. All three arc essentially a priori definitions as to what might constrain narrative combinations. In speaking of narrative syntax, Barthes touches on one of the dreams of structuralism: that of finding the logically necessary constraints for all actions that narrative can possibly encode. Literary theory, thus

transformed into a combinatory anthropology, would then describe sequences as a "system" that would be a grammar of human possibilities. In the present context, I stress the tautological necessity of these syntactic considerations. For example, Barthes's own definition of a sequence is clearly an analytical statement, one updating Aristotle's definition: A sequence is a logical succession of nuclei bound together by a relation of solidarity: the sequence opens when one of its terms has no solidary antecedent and closes when another of its terms has no consequent. (272-73) This is an expansion of a definition using the schema A or -A.

Sequences are what they are until they aren't. This is undoubtedly true, but of little help when it comes to offering criteria for minimal units of meaning. For in practice this definition can apply to virtually any element in the narrative, and it is largely an interpretive fiat, even in Barthes's simple examples, that defines when a sequence is finished. Interpretation is not arbitrary. Any interpretation can be argued on objective grounds.

But interpretation is not a scientific description based on criteria we all see.

The structuralist dream was, as I suggested, to describe the precoded openings and closings of actions that would be a lexicon of the human possibilities that generate all narratives. This dream might be likened to Kant's hope of finding a justification for a priori synthetic statements: those propositions that would be necessarily true and yet would contain truths that are more than mere expansions in the predicate of what is logically contained in the subject. Barthes thinks he finds in what he calls the namable sequence-Fraud, Betrayal, Contract, Seduction-the a priori possibilities of narration that order every action. He refuses these sequences any empirical relation to the world, almost

ludicrously refuses them empirical status, as when he comments on that most popular sequence, Seduction: Any function which initiates a seduction prescribes from the moment it appears, in the name to which it gives rise, the entire process of seduction such as we have learned it from all the narratives which have fashioned in us the language of narrative. (273) If Barthes learned all he knew about seduction from narratives, then he might claim that the autonomy of literature has received empirical confirmation. One suspects, however, that it is an a priori axiom that leads Barthes to declare that the knowledge enacted in texts is one that is only enacted in texts. The axiom is demonstrably incoherent. It makes sense only if viewed as an attempt to apply to literature the structural linguistic axiom that decrees that the system of language and all that it encodes are autonomous. This refusal of extralinguistic phenomena in literature is a bizarre restriction mechanically entailed by the notion of a closed system, since, if the system were open, then it would not be a finite combinatory system. Moreover, the complexity of possibilities to be "encoded" would overwhelm the project of listing, in the form of a closed combinatory system, all the possible sequences that narrative agents can undertake. Which is probably the case.

The assumption that a narrative, like a linguistic system, is a closed combinatory system with a finite number of elements is an interesting heuristic assumption, even if it fails when submitted to the test of experience: how many readers can come up with how many parsings of sequences of any given fiction? Textual labyrinths, to use a different metaphor for narratives, allow an indefinite number of combinations, which suggests that narration is a language game with some rather different rules from, say, a strictly logical combinatory. The structuralist may hope that recursive procedures will enable him to find the system for combinatory possibilities, but the skeptic will reply that it is

not possible to define rigorously the elements in narrative that might be subject to recursive rules. The mathematical model is tantalizing. Barthes was also , 4 I Structuralism 123 influenced in his formalization by developments in information theory, for he wanted to see his theory working through binary oppositions, or what he calls functions and indices. However, by Barthes's own recognition, this particular opposition is a refurbishing of the most worn philosophical abstractions: doing and being. Everything in the text can be recuperated by this conceptual pair.

The concept of "doing" rules over events. That of "being" is found at the second level of analysis, that of actions. Barthes invokes Aristotle in this regard, the patron saint of all structuralists. In the Poetics, Aristotle grants action precedence over character, for the Philosopher seems to think that one can imagine actions without characters, but not the converse. Barthes uses this position to endorse his attack on the humanist concept of character. According to the humanism for which Barthes has only disdain, literature embodies psychological essences from which actions derive like accidents from an essence in classical ontology. This caricature docs not seem altogether cogent, all the more so in that Aristotle is the source of this classical ontology. Aristotle's view of action is that a work of literature, specifically a tragedy, embodies an essence or action that characters in turn manifest. Hence, character is secondary to action. This is not entirely germane, for Barthes's basic agenda is to attack the bourgeois vision of the individualized self that academic literary theory had put at the center of literary creation as well as representation. To attack this mythic individual-the repository of bourgeois ideology-Barthes defines action by saying that it is what defines an actant, or a character reduced to the role of a participant in an action. This is a plausible definition, since it

essentially means that there can be no narration without agents undertaking the action's narrative.

Barthes wants at all costs to define this agent in terms other than as a human character. There is more than a little conceptual overkill involved in this antihumanism.

Reducing characters to "actants" is also part of the project of finding a grammar of human possibilities. Barthes, comparable to theorists like Greimas, Bremond, and the Todorov of the 1960s, wants to define characters as the agents of definable macrosequences, such as Seduction or Fraud. These macrosequences are logically composed by the rnicrosequences defined at the first level of analysis. Character is in tum defined in terms of participation in a sphere of actions: These spheres being few in number, typical, and classifiable; which is why this second level of description, despite its being that of the characters, here has been called the level of Actions: the word actions is not to be understood in the sense of the trifling acts which form the tissue of the first level but in that of the major cuticulalions of praxis (desire, communications, struggle). (279) Barthes's structural criteria for "major articulations" arc subject to the same critique made of sequences, for any definition of the actions is an interpretation, not a semantically fixed category. Evaluation, interpretation, and fuzzy criteria are just as much in play at this level and allow for multiple hermeneutic possibilities. And the critical reader may well ask why there are just two levels of actions, mini and macro. Any real reading involves multiple groupings that can be arranged at multiple levels~ if the notion of level, with its vertical geometry, is a useful metaphor in the first place.

Moving vertically nonetheless, the reader arrives at the third level of analysis proposed by Barthcs, the level of narration. This last level is the level where readers begin, when, upon

opening a novel, they ask who is narrating to whom (or what is the rhetoric at work in the fiction).

Someone is or, in the case of a fiction, someone is supposedly narrating something to someone. As Barthes says, the reader asks who is the donor of the narrative. Narrative theory has often confused prescriptive esthetics with rhetoric in this regard, for critics from Percy Lubbock through Sartre have preferred to tell who should be the donor of the narrative rather than study the real possibilities of narration. Barthes's antihumanism leads him to a curious form of prescripti vc definition that bans the author from the narrative. I paraphrase: the person who speaks (in the narrative) is not who writes (in real life), and who writes is not who is (283). Barthes buttresses this definition of the narrator with a footnote referring to Lacan, to the effect that the hidden Other of psychoanalysis supposedly speaks in the text, there where we once thought a fictional narrator was speaking. This evocation of the Lacanian Other hardly seems to the point and can be accounted for only by Barthes's desire to ban the humanist subject, in full command of her language, from having any role in the narrative. In calling upon the Other, Barthes violates his own structuralist principles here by referring to the other subject, a locus of meaning that is outside of the closed system of the autonomous text. Barthes's visceral hatred of humanist cliches about the author is hardly a firm basis for the analysis of the rhetoric of fiction. The fictional narrator is of' course not the author, and this is a tautological truth for a fiction. The very logic of fiction demands that at the point where a fictional narrator operates, there is a separation between text and world. This is not a semiotic question, however, hut part of the meaning of the term "fiction." In strictly semiotic terms, a fictional narrator is no different from a real narrator: both arc the voice in 4 / Structuralism 125 which the narration originates.

In structural terms, Barthes secs the question of narrative voice as one that must be either personal or apersonal: first-person or third-person narration. This simplification reflects again an a priori definition. It hardly does justice to the wealth of real narrative situations we confront as readers. And it comes apart when Barthes starts reading a single sentence from Goldfinger and finds personal and apersonal narration at work in the same sentence. This conceptual pair again represents the tautological opposition of A or -A; but Barthes gilds them with a mathematical patina by calling them binary oppositions. They are binary insofar as the privative "a" negates the personal; but this gilding hides the a priori poverty of terms that are binary simply by definition alone. And in this case the concepts reflect the arbitrary assignation of referential values: anything suggesting a narrator speaking about the text is personal, and whatever doesn't, isn't.

Barthes's final definitions want to achieve final coherence by integrating all levels: The narrational level is Lhus occupied by Lhe signs of narrativity, the set of operators which reintegrate functions and actions in the narrative communication articulated on its donor and its addressee. (285) This definition points up the analytic circularity of the model. The reader knows what a function is by knowing the higher level that grants function its being. In turn, the reader grasps the functions and indices to analyze the level that in turn grants them meaning. The system is indeed closed.

For some theorists, this circularity is a guarantor of rationality. For skeptical critics, the circularity can only be taken as an exercise in coherence: the model exists true to itself like a series of self-sustaining definitions that one can admire, much as one admires the self-sustaining balance of a Calder mobile or the rhythms of a Mondrian. The theory

promises some insight into the functioning of fiction but finally seems basically to exist for the intrinsic harmony it proposes, perhaps as a solution for all the disequilibrium we normally find in the world.

In conclusion to this critique of semiotics, I note with some assurance that the world exists. It seems reasonable to suppose that a theory of literature would have something to say about the relation of the world and literary texts. Barthes recognizes the existence of the world, though with reticence. Literature's reference to a world or to a context is largely denied by structuralism's insistence on the autonomy of the signifying system. This denial might be justified as a methodological necessity; but in practice the axiom of autonomy cannot be respected. Just as the linguist must step out of some transcendental system of signifieds and look at the use people make of language to know what the significds are, so the literary theorist must in the end look at what use the "world" makes of the autonomous system-as well as what use the narrative "system" has made of the world. Barthes's concession to context and world comes when he allows that narration "can only receive its meaning from the world which makes use of it" (286-87). Barthes thinks this means that another semiotics would be necessary to explain what the world does with narratives. This reversal is an about-face that puts in question the axiom of autonomy and, with it, the Platonic dream of a transcendental narrative model whose laws are beyond the world.

Narrative is as much a part of the natural world as is the language that gives rise to it. Structuralism's principle of synchronic transcendence is a metaphysical veil that obscures what transpires in the world.

We must agree with Derrida that metaphysics stands at the heart of structuralism. The metaphysical opposition of nature and culture stands behind the definitions that semiotics offers to justify its tautological moves. Barthes wanted to be, above all, the "semioclast" who forced us to face the conventionality of what we take as natural. Culture masquerading as nature is the perversion of truth that the semioclast cannot abide. His revelation that culture mimics nature leads to a metaphysical attack on metaphysics. Unfortunately, this is not a comic confusion. Decrying conventional institutions for their imitation of nature has become a sounding cry throughout the academy from those bent on righting wrongs. It is not certain that attacking culture for masquerading as nature is the most profitable way to go about eliminating racism, sexism, and other iniquities. Aside from the fact that this attack is based on metaphysical confusion, facile denunciation has never effected social change. Most racists, sexists, homophobes, and the like could care less if their values are cultural or natural. By valorizing the cultural or the conventional over the natural, radicals have made no progress, but merely reversed evaluations of the negative and positive poles of the tautology that makes of everything culture or not-culture, i.e., nature.

This tautological game misses the point that, when values are at stake, the metaphysics of nature is hardly germane. Ethics and politics must work from the rational necessity of tolerance.

Barthes's strategy for literary theory is one that makes of narrative at once a cultural product and a natural product of language, a natural system that is transcendent with laws that we have no more power to change than we can change the transcendent system of language, or perhaps the laws of DNA combinations. This affirmation of the priority both of

culture and nature leads, from a rationalist viewpoint, to a 4 I Structuralism 127 contradiction. Structuralism can hardly reconcile its belief in nature with Barthes's assertion that in the world "there is no counting the number of narrational devices which seek to naturalize the subsequent narrative by feigning to make it the outcome of some natural circumstance" (287). It may be true that there is no counting the number of narrational devices that happen to exist, for they serve many purposes. It is simply selfrighteous hyperbole to reduce these devices to the fundamental purpose of a conspiracy to make culture look as if it were nature. Nor is this a likely foundation for a poetics. An intelligent poetics will try to bring order to literary understanding by looking for larger strategies that may operate within the welter of narratives the world offers. But the old metaphysics of culture and nature can only put blinders on us. As theorists, we need to be paying attention to the very real challenge for a theory of culture that is emerging in biology, neurology, and neighboring theories drawing upon them, such as complexity theory, information science, and the cognitive disciplines. Metaphysics of the structuralist sort can only be a hindrance to the understanding of human beings, organisms for whom it is natural to have culture. However, we are not finished with metaphysics, nor with the tautologies derived from them; and for their most recent appearance we need now to turn to poststructuralist thought that, like some Hegelian Weltgeist, has dismembered structuralism and yet kept it alive by sublimating it into new forms. Or, as they once said about French kings, stressing continuity with rupture: Saussure is dead; long live Saussure.

Two Poststructuralisms

Poststructuralism is one of several doctrines that bears the prefix "post" and that confronts contemporary readers. Contemporary thought seems convinced that we are always coming after something else-which is tautologically true, if not always informative. "Postmodern" is a useful term if we mean by it that we have modified and rejected a number of the doctrines of literary modernism. Following Humpty Dumpty's example, let us define the term precisely so, and, for purposes of literary theory, declare that "postmodern" also designates theories and theorists who in some sense are modifying structuralism. Structuralism has many analogies with the modernist movement in literature, especially in its desire to treat a spatialized literary "system" as a transcendent locus of meaning.

The spatialization of form, or attempts at spatialization, has been considered a hallmark of modernism. Opposing this geometric iconicity, poststructuralism and postmodernism insist on the dynamic nature of meaning. However, a caveat: though once designating aesthetic and theoretical principles standing in opposition to modernism, postmodern has become an amorphous term. When not used in specific, often polemical contexts, "postmodern" is used laudatively for anything from a TV series to the latest theory on the death of art. Poststructuralism, by contrast, has a fairly precise meaning. Poststructuralist literary theory designates either trends in psychoanalytic theory inspired by the writings and teachings of Jacques Lacan or the theories of deconstruction professed by the philosopher Jacques Derrida. Or both. Other contemporaries may vie for honors in the poststructural pantheon, but clearly none have had the importance that these two Parisian thinkers have had.

Specifically, Lacan and Derrida are the most influential contemporary thinkers who have imported Saussure into their theoretical concern with, respectively, Freudian

psychoanalysis and Heideggerian thinking against metaphysics. They are poststructuralist in the sense that they use structural linguistics to go beyond it: hence their postposition. Jacques Lacan first merits consideration for using Saussure to invent a new version of psychoanalytic theory-after Levi-Strauss had shown how structuralism could be bent to the needs of anthropology. In a sense, Lacan was a neo-Freudian who tried to do for psychoanalysis what LeviStrauss had done for ethnology. Derrida drew upon Saussure for many of his anticonceptual concepts, using Saussure to think against Saussure.

Used now as a seasoning for every sauce, Derrida's deconstruction largely derives from Heidegger's desire to overcome metaphysics. For Derrida, this apparently endless task has meant developing elaborate reading strategies by which one shows that metaphysics is at work in the thought of theorists who are unaware of their reliance on unquestioned axioms. Drawing upon Saussure, and Levi-Strauss and Lacan, Derrida has done major deconstructive readings of Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Lacan, and a host of other thinkers-including Heidegger.

Psychoanalytic Poststructuralism First, Jacques Lacan. Once a practicing psychoanalyst and teacher in Paris, he has been a source for the renewal of psychoanalytic theory in the American academy, at least in such humanistic disciplines as literature, philosophy, and women's studies. His work is still being published, and transcriptions of his seminars may keep surfacing for some time to come. The basic tenets of his thought can be found in the Ecrits, the written papers he arranged for publication as a single work.

But any beginning reader might be well advised to start with one of the seminars, such as The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis.

Lacan called for a return to the writings of Freud, but Lacan's brand of psychoanalysis appears, when first encountered, to bear little resemblance to orthodox Freudianism. Lacan imposed on Freud the structuralist matrix and fashioned an analytical doctrine that marries repression and the unconscious with concepts that describe the linguistic system Saussure had created. This eclecticism, drawing freely if not arbitrarily upon Hegel and Heidegger, produced a rather hybridized mix, expressed in a contorted French whose syntax derives from the prose of the surrealist Andre Breton and, in its most hermetic forms, the poet Mallarme. Lacan's intellectual acrobatics are once tonic for their capacity to explain everything and self-consciously tragic in their captious demonstrations that no explanation makes any difference at all, for the grandiose web of tautologies that Lacan spins out propose that we can do little when it comes to curing the mentally ill, or alleviating the usual neuroses that we all live with. Or especially remedying the fact that we must die. A good many theorists, however, have found that Lacanian concepts speak in the literary texts they theorize about.

Lacan apparently did not discover Saussure until after he had begun his career. But Lacan had a structuralist frame of mind from the outset.

This attitude is evident in Lacan's doctoral thesis. In it, Lacan sets forth a structuralist credo for psychiatry. First published in 1932, as De la psychose paranoiaque dans ces rapports avec la personnalite, the thesis defines personality as a "system," with the following model for describing the psyche in a priori terms: We can set forth the general conditions that every system of personality must satisfy in order to be acceptable. Every system explaining personality must be structural, by which we mean that personality must be capable of being constructed [composee] from elements

that are primitive in relation to its development, be it from relatively simple organic relations of which, according to the individuals, will vary the register in quality, in extent, and the range in direction, in intensity, etc. 1 Lacan defines personality using a combinatory model, though he offers no precise definition as to what would be the minimum units that would enter into the system. He speaks of an analytical distinction of the model and the object of the model, though in the work nothing really distinguishes between the two. And no proviso is made for some empirical confirmation that the model describes something other than itself. Personality is simply defined as a process--0r model-for which a finite combinatory model offers a reductive definition. The implicit circularity in the definition seems endemic to structuralist thought. Or perhaps to any science that cannot distinguish between a subject's competence and the model that purpons to describe that competence.

Many theorists believe that Freudian methodology is not incompatible with this structural procedure. The structuralist can argue that Freudian "structuralism" involves a series of interlocking definitions that explain all personality in combinatory terms. For example, the Oedipal complex can be defined as a finite set of combinatory schemata that give rise to the multiplicity of personalities we encounter in the world. After Lacan' s encounter with linguistics, Lacan had a model for rewriting Freud's "structuralism." Rejecting the literal nature of Freudian concepts such as the unconscious, Lacan declares that all rules for the combinatory system of the psyche can be seen in public purview in what is essentially grammatical space, or the space of rules for language. Lacan's denial of , 5 I hidden depths is part of the postmodern reaction against modernism's topology. Moreover, his rejection of hidden depths is part of a redefinition of Freud's unconscious. Freud, a modernist to be sure, had conceived the unconscious as a hidden agency in

a hidden place. Its workings must be inferred or deciphered in order to get around its deceit.

In his belief in the symbol's power to effect revelation, Freud conformed to the post-Kantian aspect of modernism that believed that ultimate reality is beyond phenomenal appearances. It was also part of the modernist inheritance of romanticism that led Freud to conceive of the psychic space of the unconscious much on the model of the romantic netherworld wherein work the infernal deities.

Lacan said that Freud's unconscious is not the unconscious of the romantics-no nocturnal deities are to be found there.2 Lacan certainly found no deities there, and the irony-if denying the obvious is irony-is typical of Lacan's strategy in rewriting Freud. In wrapping himself in Freud's cloak, Lacan wants to divest the master of his romantic inheritance while transforming Freud into a Lacanian linguist. Lacan is the inheritor of a very French rationalist tradition: he wants to define the unconscious structurally with all the diurnal clarity of a mathematical theorem-however obscure Lacan may be in his attempts at mathematics. Lacan transforms Freud to use him as a springboard for a structuralism that "reads" the unconscious as a public space that is defined in combinatory terms. After Lacan's discovery of Saussure, the unconscious can be made visible using concepts borrowed from Saussure's linguistic paradigm. By a remarkable coincidence, the psyche and its unconscious can be described by locating them along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of discourse. The psyche is defined by the axes organizing linguistic space, which Lacan says arc also the axes organizing the rhetorical figures of metonymy and metaphor. This all comes together in an abrupt conceptual leap: Lacan declares that the unconscious reveals itself, in a break, in its desire that unfolds along the metonymic axis of organization of language, or as I interpret Lacan's lines in

the seminar on the four fundamental concepts: Thus the unconscious always manifests itself as that which vacillates in a break in the subject-whence springs forth a discovery that Freud assimilates to desire-a desire that we shall provisionally situate in the revealed metonymy of the discourse in question in which t11e subject is seized at some unexpected point. (29) Here an entire theory of literature is about to emerge in a metaphor about metonymy.

Before giving in to the euphoria produced by seizing the unconscious through an explication de texte, the skeptic may ask what justifies defining the unconscious as a point manifesting itself on a pair of spatialized axes purporting to describe the functioning of a hypothetical linguistic system. The linkage is not self-evident. The justification lies in a pair of a priori assumptions that Lacan articulates in often cryptic sayings. Lacan had contempt for the principles of exposition that most scientists would respect, which has delighted the irrationalists among his readers. Lacan was nonetheless a rationalist whose contempt accompanied a will to mastery over discourse that led to the formulations that Lacan delighted in when baffling a public usually made up of psychiatrists whom he also held in contempt. His theory, like any other, begins with axioms that need justification if his conclusions are to be accepted. For starters, one can ponder Lacan' s declaration that the subject is the serf of language. 3 This is the kind of axiom that does not readily admit of empirical confirmation, largely because it clothes in metaphor a tautology defining what constitutes a human being.

In general, poststructural thought starts with the axiom that the human subject does not or even cannot exist outside of language. This is an expansion of the tautology that to be human is to be human-in which "human" is usually used,

ambiguously, to mean both a biological entity and a being endowed with language. Without language, one is not human. This is, however, simply a definition, at most a criterion for how we are willing to use the word "person." (And upon reflection, most of us would probably not accept this axiom.) With this tautology in hand, one can then reverse the terms and argue that to be human is to exist through language. And, with a bit of legerdemain, the Lacanian theorist then argues that, if to be human is to exist through language, then the science of language has the methodology that explains what it means to be human. Linguistics offers the royal way to explaining human phenomena if human phenomena are "always already" preeminently linguisticsince language always preexists every human's coming into the world.

The latter is a simple biological fact that is converted in the above reasoning into a logical necessity.

The next step in becoming a Lacanian is acceptance of the idea that it is meaningful to declare that to be human is to be a subject. This sounds at once psychological and grammatical. And it is. Lacan's concept of subject is elaborated at once according to a Freudian definition and a linguistic definition. If the psyche is at once a linguistic and a psychic space, then the subject is constituted by signifiers-by definition, since signifiers are linguistic space. The combinatory elements are then in place for inventing the Lacanian models of what it means to be human, l 5 I which is to say, a subject that is an unconscious informed or structured by language. What might be interesting heuristic hypotheses-if one could frame any way of testing them-are used as combinatory principles that allow the analysis to deduce truths that describe the human subject. Lacan's later attempts at using mathematical formalisms to express his ideas spring from this belief in the power of a priori

axioms to describe empirical reality. Lacan seemed willing in fact to believe that the combinatory power of verbal axioms was little different from mathematical principles; and both could generate a posteriori truths.

In this respect Lacan is the last of the Kantians.

The inOucnce of linguistics on Lacan is almost clearly expressed in "Fonction et champ de la parole" (1953), in which Lacan declared that linguistics must serve as a guide to psychoanalysis, since it already had that role in anthropology. 4 Lacan alludes here to his debt to Levi-Strauss and the latter's attempts to explain myths by applying the structuralist model to them as if they were languages. Lacan wanted to elaborate a theory that, as a human science, would propose a model in harmony with some general system of explanation of human phenomena. This general anthropology presupposed finding the foundations for a general human science. To this end, linguistics would have a role analogous to that of physics as the underpinning for all other "regional" sciences. This desire may sound absurdly ambitious, but it is characteristic of structuralist thought. In its search for foundations, the structuralist search for a totalizing human science led f ,acan to the conclusion that phonology could play the role for human sciences that atomic physics plays for the sciences of nature. Skeptics should not underestimate the imaginative power of phonology; there is poetry in its differential model describing a closed combinatory system that, with a finite number of distinctive features, can theoretically allow infinite sequences or phonetic segments.

In scientific rapture, Lacan saw in phonology something like the quantum mechanics of the human sciences: The form of mathemalisalion in which is inscribed the discovery of the phoneme as a function of paired opposites formed by the

smallcsl discernible clements in semantics brings us lo lhe foundations by which Freud's last doctrine designates, in a vocalic connotation of presence and absence, the subjective sources of the symbolic function.5 The physicist could note that one does not have to describe phonemes in terms of oppositions: any mathematical description of a phoneme can be in positive acoustic terms, to which the linguist could reply that phonemes arc in part psychological constructs in which oppositions play a role that acoustics cannot account for. But that is not really germane, since Lacan's idea of mathematics is perpetually metaphorical-and misleading. In his mind, phonology is a kind of mathematics, based on geometric oppositions. Tilis is all rather muddled, but it is the type of sweeping thought that leads him to misapply the term "algorithm" to Saussure's graphic presentation of the sign. I shall return to this point, but, first, there is another confusion to bring up. There is nothing "semantic" about the description of phonemes: the differential oppositions of phonemes has nothing to do with how words have meaning. Any language has a fixed number of phonemes that combine indifferently, according to combinatory possibilities, to form morphemes. Morphemes are defined by their semantic property. Lacan thus makes at least two erroneous interpretations of the linguistic system, confusing the fact that, at the phonemic level, the system is amenable to a mathematical description, with the idea that the phonemic system itself is in some sense a form of mathematics. But it is not mathematical in itself. And any extrapolation from phonology to semantics, which is hardly amenable to mathematical formalization, is as unjustified as is the comparison Lacan makes above in drawing an analogy between phonology and Freud's theory of symbols.

The analogies that Lacan makes with phonology must be kept in mind, however, for Lacan uses the image of phonemic oppositions in several respects. One recalls that

Saussure wanted to see concepts cutting out meaning, through opposition, in some semantic space that is analogous to the acoustic space out of which phonemes carve their existence, differentially, in opposition to other phonemes. Saussure conceived a continuum of concepts based on the analogy of the sound continuum out of which phonemes carve a space. To use Saussure's bad analogy, concepts exist by cutting up semantic fields out of a conceptual continuum. The whole analogy is confused, for it is senseless to speak of concepts carving up some space on analogy with a sound continuum. (A sound continuum can be mathematically described by physics; a conceptual continuum is an indefinite notion that exists only as a metaphor, one of dubious use.) Nonetheless, Lacan draws upon this analogy in his reflections on the way the sign carves up a space that anchors the subject. For Lacan also wants to use the Saussurian definition of the sign as a starting point for psychoanalysis-now conceived as another science of language. Psychoanalysis becomes a theory of the human subject as it is structured by language.

In this context, it is worth recalling that the sign for Saussure is the union of a signified with a signifier, or a concept with a material embodiment thereof, such as an "acoustic image." The relation between r 5 I the two is arbitrary, for there is nothing in the "image" that motivates its relation to the concept. The linguist Benveniste has pointed out that Saussure confused referent and concept in this regard, for there is nothing in the referent "cow," chewing its cud in a field, that motivates a relation with the morpheme "cow," composed of English phonemes. However, the relation between signifier and signified "cow" is necessary, for it is only with a problematic, logical distinction that I can produce one without the other, or the signifier without the signified. Translation examples have confused the issue, for Saussure argued that boeuf and Ochs

have the same signified, which, as I noted earlier, is not consistent with his theory that signifieds are determined within the differential system of a single language. What is important for Lacan is that Saussure tried to spatialize the presentation of the relation of the signified and the signifier by writing the signified over the signifier and then separating the two by a line. This creates a representation of the sign showing that the concept stands above the signifier-perhaps reigning in the Platonic heaven that Derrida finds in this definition of the sign. The geometryloving Saussure drew up a representation of the arbitrary relationship that appears, in the formula, as a rather necessary one.

Mathematics-loving Lacan seized upon this representation of the sign to found a way of defining the subject. He decreed Saussure's formula to be the "algorithm" that mimics the formalization of the subject. The formula also sets up two separate linguistic domains. As Stephen Gaukroger has perceptively noted, Lacan needed the two domains in order to explain Freud's suggestion that, in the separation of the manifest and latent content of a dream, a different language was at work in each content. Rising to the challenge Freud presented, Lacan hit upon the spatialized formula that Saussure had offered him for signified and signifier, or in Gaukroger's words: Lacan inverts the formula to give Sis, to indicate that the signifier bas "priority" over the signified: it docs not merely represent it, it "enters" it and there is an "incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier". But this is just the first stage. Lacan maintains that all language is inherently metaphorical.

In his account of the metaphor, what happens is that a new signifier replaces the old one, and the old signifier "drops" to the level of the signified, that is, S/s becomes S'/S. Lacan then uses this account as a model for repression.

Repression is the operation by which the subject attempts to repel, or confine to the unconscious, certain representations (thoughts, images, memories) which would provoke unpleasure. 6 Finally, all is metaphor, and the subject is a text, though a suppressed text that only the theorist can read. By redefining Saussure, Lacan buttresses his claim that the entire structure of language is found in the unconscious (e.g., Ecrits, p. 494). Alternatively, the unconscious is structured like a language.

What has this elaboration of tautologies about the human subject and language to do with a theory of literature? Everything and nothing, as is the case with most totalizing theories. Everything, since literature is a play of signifiers. Nothing, since literature is not necessarily amenable to psychoanalytic explanation, as Lacan himself recognized; and nothing in a larger sense in that, by placing the signifying system in the unconscious, Lacan deprives us of conscious communication. All communication is miscommunication, and the world of human existence tragically consists in a realm of repressed signifiers forever going astray.

Theorists find it rather heady business, however, that Lacan transforms everything into metaphor and metonymy, which is to say, literature. All of culture can be defined as discourse, which is to say, a state of affairs in which the play of metaphor represses the play of metonymy-the latter conceived as the axis of desire. Drawing on other Lacanian concepts, the literary theorist can mix even more elaborate conceptual cocktails, for example, by using the Lacanian triad of psychic functions to enrich his, or probably more often her, poststructuralism. In addition to the two axes of discourse proposed by structuralism, Lacan set forth a triadic schema to define the psyche. For, in addition to an unconscious subject, it seems obvious that there is a

conscious dimension to the psyche. I think that this is what Lacan calls the ego, an agency created by the imaginary function.

And, to complete the Hegelian appearance, Lacan adds a third function to the psyche, the enigmatic "real." This triad of psychic functions attribute all psychic activity to one part of the triad: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real.

This triad can, among other things, define psychic development. The Lacanian must account for the fact that, at some point, we are present to ourselves as something other than a repressed subject. Lacan argues that we are present as an ego that is a creation of the imaginary that begins to develop when we, as children, discover ourselves as other in the image of the mirror. It is only at a later stage of development that Lacan sees us acquiring the symbolic function. Upon learning a language, a child acquires the symbolic function, or, as Lacan says, we enter into relations that are mediated by the Other-the Other of the symbolic function embodied in language. Some old-fashioned existentialism has been refurbished in Lacan' s doctrine of the Other. The ego comes to exist through a mediation allowing the child to perceive himself as an image and hence as other than himself; whereas the symbolic function-or cultural codes-constitute subjectivity through values and relations encoded in r 5 I language. Language is supposedly a repository of cultural values, or what Lacan calls the Other. Acquiring these symbolic relations, the psyche is constituted by mediations of what is other than the self. Sartre's (or Hegel's) dialectic of self and other is defined by Lacan to include a linguistic dimension and, as far as the "subject" is concerned, only a linguistic dimension. The subject is the serf of language.

The Other is ultimately the Father, and the phallus is the signifier that serves as the foundation for all others. I refrain from comment on this definition except to note that from a feminist perspective this sounds like a description of what is wrong with our culture; and, of course, from a male chauvinist viewpoint, what is right with it.

Lacan's so-called functions are tautological whirligigs, to recycle another Sartrian metaphor. They define the psyche by saying that we are what we are not, and we are not what we are. This means that we can define images and language as things that we must interiorize in order to constitute ourselves and as things that are always exterior to the psyche. I am I-that is, both the imaginary image I have of me that comes from the other; and, for the same reason, I am not I. For I am also constituted by the other. The same play with tautologies can apply to language, though Lacan places language, in its determination of the psyche, in the unconscious. This makes the signifieds all the more powerful in that they speak the subject without the subject knowing it-and this is necessarily the case, since that is the definition of the unconscious. Lacan plays other mediation games, especially with desire. Desire is defined as what it is on the basis of what it is not. Desire is always desire of what isn't, since one does not desire what one already has or is. Lacan plays with the ambiguity of the expression, "desire of the Other," to claim that desire is mediated by the other, both in the sense that one desires the other's desire because the other desires it and in the sense that one desires what is other than oneself-for desire is always desire beyond a lack-by definition.

Signifiers dictate psychology; and beyond the tautology lies the pun as a principle of knowledge.

The symbolic is what is not in the imaginary, and the imaginary is what is not in the symbolic. These two functions exist according to the basic tautological unitary principle affirming A or -A. But Lacan offers a third function for the psyche, or at least makes the gesture of doing so, perhaps to escape the appearance of working only with simple tautologies. The third order is the order of the real. The real is not what Freud meant by reality, that stern monitor of objectivity that imposes constraints upon desire. Lacan defines the real as what exists for the subject beyond language: by definition it is what cannot be said. Beyond A or -A there is ... the ineffable, perhaps as in a Zen parable. We spend a great deal of time speaking about the real, but by definition we cannot name it. The tautological opposition of the imaginary and the symbolic is what informs his model of the psyche, though the ineffable real has a role in Lacan's tragic vision. Whenever the real tears language asunder, it introduces madness into the subject. Logical truths can be torn asunder.

In this sense, the real can be likened to the tragic, much as Nietzsche defined it for the Greeks. Lacan's psychoanalysis, like Freud's, returns to origins of tragic thought to define the human project as an impossible one, marked by tragic anguish and perpetual failure.

Mental illness, neurosis, and deviance characterize Lacan's vision of the subject, since the ego exists for us only in the illusory identifications the imaginary offers, while our "authentic being" is found in the absent world of signifiers, constituted by the Other, over which we have no control. In a sense, we live in fictions, in the alienated realm of imaginations, believing our ego to be a substantial self that is empowered in some positive sense to say what it means and to do what it wants.

From the Lacanian perspective, the self that humanists hope to enrich through literature is in a state of perpetual split, in which the imaginary ego floats in intersection with the alienated and repressed subject. In his seminar on the ego in Freud, Lacan describes the ego to be merely a "point of attachment" between common discourse, in which the subject is caught and alienated, and the subject's psychological reality. And our imaginary relation is always "deviant" insofar as it is in this relation that the break or gap occurs through which death acquires presence. This is the break that allows psychosis to spring forth. Madness lurks forever ready to break in upon the deluded ego.

But what does it mean that the subject can only be conceived as an alienation in language? In one seminar, Lacan means that language is, by its very nature, an alienation: "Le monde du symbole, dont le fondement meme est le phenomcne de l'insistance repetitive, est alienant pour le sujet, ou plus exactement ii est cause de ce que le sujet se realise toujours ailleurs, et que sa verite est toujours voilee par quclque partie."7 I gloss this antihumanist manifesto to read that the symbolic world whose very foundation is the phenomenon of insistent repetition-since signs acquire identity through repetition-is alienating for the subject, or more exactly, this world is the cause of the fact that the subject's truth is always hidden from the subject in some other realm. This is not a self-evident proposition, and it does not follow automatically from the fact that language preexists the subject that the subject is dominated by language, for example, alienated within language. But this kind of reasoning has had extraordinary appeal for a generation of theorists who want to find some cause for their malaise with culture. The demolition of the 5 I humanist self has had a certain jejune appeal, for it at once relieves us all of any responsibility for our actions while granting the theorist empowered with this antihumanist theory the

capacity to read messages that no self can read by introspection. The theorist is empowered to do what the humanist thought she could do by the light of reason-but she was deluded. There is nothing especially original about this: the theorist is granted the power every psychiatrist wants or hopes to have when dealing with the mad.

Deconstructive Poststructuralism The appeal Lacan has had for some of the better minds in the academy resembles the appeal that Lacan's severe critic, Jacques Derrida, has had.

Both enable literary theorists to exert power where they had none before: Lacan demolishes the illusion of self-knowledge while granting the theorist access to hidden signifiers. Comparably, Derrida turns the theorist into a destroyer of fixed interpretations by unleashing the play of difference that takes away our power over language. In both cases the humanist or rationalist self is deprived of its capacity to arrive at a determination of meaning through self-reflexive rationality. With both Lacan and Derrida, meaning is forever beyond the self's ken, since the self is an alienated product of slipping signifiers or, in Derrida's coinage, "differance." Derrida's brand of deconstruction involves some of the same kind of tautological moves we see in Lacan, for, as poststructuralists, they are remarkably close in certain respects, however much Derrida may have attempted, with rather ill humor, to deconstruct his elder, the good doctor Lacan.

Perhaps Derrida's ill humor reflected his spite about how Lacan had already grabbed Saussure for his purposes. Or perhaps it betrays a lack of gratitude for the way Lacan demonstrated that culture can be construed as a tautological potlatch. If, to this end, Lacan tries to marry Freud and Saussure, Derrida attempts much the same nuptials with Heidegger and Saussure. This unlikely union is

accomplished in On Grammatology, undoubtedly Derrida's most important work. He invents here an imaginary "science" of writing by applying Heidegger's deconstruction to Saussure's science of language. Derrida has little trouble showing that traces of metaphysical thought lurk in the Saussure's concepts. However, Derrida maintains that it is only by using these concepts that one can hope to think through these metaphysical determinations of thought and arrive at some hypothetical closure of the era of metaphysics.

Deconstruction comes appropriately at the end of our considerations of literary theory because, in announcing both the necessity and the end of metaphysics, deconstruction is a theory that undermines all theories by proclaiming the theoretical impossibility of a theory that would not be centered in the illusions of metaphysics. This is not unlike the selfdestructive stance of the historist thought that proclaims its arbitrary nature because it is historical. Deconstruction tears itself apart by proclaiming the arbitrariness of its own meaning.

In this way, deconstruction is as much a philosophical stance as a theory per se. Perhaps because it makes of reading a theoretical activity, deconstruction has come to have significant influence in the departments of literature throughout the United States, though, perhaps for the same reason, relatively little influence in departments of philosophy. Unfortunately, the term is now used in the most disparate contexts, so that artists, filmmakers, journalists, and rock musicians are all said to deconstruct whatever they work upon. Perhaps this is why Derrida was willing, in the New York Times Magazine (23 January 1994), to declare deconstruction to be in its death throes. Y ct, in its ongoing death, deconstruction remains basically a pedagogical activity-as Foucault once acerbically retort.ed to Derrida's

deconstructive jabs at him. It is a teaching activity that uses theory to read literary and philosophical texts in order to confirm the theory that ·denies fixity of meaning in literary and philosophical texts and thus confirm itself as a master of illusions. There is a narcissistic circularity about deconstruction that explains its attraction-it places the commentator in the center of the theoretical activity-as well as its repugnant side-it has become a mechanical exercise allowing every graduate student to show her superiority to the text.

Anecdotal comments about the activities of deconstruction in the United States are of little interest, but it is more than an anecdote to state that, more than from any reasoned critique, deconstruction has suffered from the revelation that one of its leading practitioners, Paul de Man, had written anti-Semitic journalism during the Nazi occupation of Belgium.

Retrospectively, critics could note affinities between de Man's nihilistic readings of the uncertainty of rhetoric in literature and his earlier rightwing ideology. More to the point than retrospective readings of de Man, however, would be a critical examination of deconstruction's origins in Nietzsche and Heidegger. The genealogy of deconstruction is profoundly right-wing, whatever may have been the specifics of de Man's hidden fascist inclinations or, for that matter, of Derrida's undoubted political correctness. I do not think that it is indifferent that deconstruction, as an intellectual stance, is historically inscribed in an assault on democratic values.

5 I The assault on metaphysics that deconstruction undertakes draws primarily upon Heidegger's attempt to return Western thought to the preSocratics.

This philosophy is reactionary in the truest sense of the term.

But deconstruction also originates in the Nietzschian critique of Western philosophy and the will to truth. This critique is contemptuous of democratic liberalism. Nietzsche is an antidemocratic thinker that his left-wing followers, such as Foucault, have usually pushed forward because of the dazzling nature of his critique of the belief in truth.

Nietzsche's reactionary thought remains unscathed even if recent books have obliged practitioners of deconstruction to recognize reluctantly the Nazi past that Heidegger never renounced. But even before he became a Nazi, in Being and Time Heidegger offered a reactionary vision of fallen everyday life; and this antidemocratic critique must be read as part of his project to rethink the basic metaphysical categories that have traditionally organized our thought. In other words, contempt for liberal democracy is central to Heidegger's thought. It may seem that the current endorsement of deconstruction by academic radicals is no more contradictory than the feminist use of the Lacan for whom the founding signifier of the symbolic order is the phallus. However, a mere liberal rationalist, attempting to avoid contradiction, may have some difficulty reconciling some of these antitheses. She might even suspect that deconstruction, in the academy, is not necessarily in the service of those democratic goals furthered by the advancement of learning.

Deconstruction has probably found greatest favor among the neoleft.ist academics who want to put in question the traditional categories that organize the way the university curriculum approaches the teaching of Western thought. Postmodernity and poststructuralism have become rallying cries in curricular reform; and deconstruction has seen itself

promoted as a kind of programmatic theory for rereading Western history. These rereadings of the central texts of European cultural history are undertaken in such a way that the various dominant centers of discourse-logos, god, Man-- can be undone; or, if not undone, these metaphysical centers of discourse can be shown to organize our thought even when we thought we were free from the past. There is something laudable about this project insofar as it promotes a critical self-awareness about the power of cultural matrices to organize our thought even when we think that, having broken with the past, we are most original. Of course, the cultural conservative may well reply that she is perfectly well aware that the past shapes our thought and our discourse, and that this is a perfectly normal and even desirable state of affairs. A conservative reading of deconstruction points to the most interesting contradiction of deconstruction: it is an attempt at a radical critique of metaphysics, but it ends up being utterly reactionary, for all it can demonstrate is the power to endure that characterizes the major themes of W estem cultural history.

I shall try to make this a bit clearer by some useful simplification.

Deconstructive discourse is notoriously obscure, for Derrida often seems to delight in willful complications mixing linguistic terminology and philosophical concepts. Complication is a working procedure of deconstruction, since the "immense task" that Derrida always underscores as the goal of deconstruction is always nothing less than unraveling the total history of W estem thought by focusing on a single concept or representation.

This is a strategy of intimidation for which Derrida should receive at least a black belt. But deconstruction proceeds from a few axioms that can be grasped in a relatively

unproblematical way. The basic axiom or tautology for deconstructive theory is that Western thought has always conceived of truth as presence. By definition, truth is not absence. Truth either is (present) or it isn't (present). This unitary principle of A or -A sets up the first tautology. The deconstructive theorist then reads this definition to mean that the "meaning of being in general" has always been conceived as presence. The origins of this concept of being are found in the Greeks, or, with a bit of a time lapse after the fall of the Roman empire, in Heidegger's interpretation of the Greek determinations of being as ousia, which Heidegger translates as Anwesenheit, or presence. Actually, this notion of truth as the full presence of being entered the Western tradition largely through Christianity's interpretation of being as parousia, for Christianity conceived of truth as the full presence of the being of God at the second coming. This Christian determination of truth as present being is, according to Derrida, the axiom underlying all our philosophical determinations of truth. For something truly to be, it must be present, as the sound of the word is present in our inner ear when we speak the truth, or when a true proposition makes concepts present to us in their presence as truth.

In Derrida's most well anthologized essay, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"-a piece of reading now required in many English departments-Derrida makes the claim that the definition of being as presence has taken many forms in Western thought; but this Protean definition of truth and being always remains the same even as it manifests itself in many guises. The metaphysics of presence is the strategy by which Western thought has given itself a center that allows thought to escape from indeterminacy-or what Derrida defines as play. He condenses this all in the following proposition that he claims to be able to substantiate: 5 I It could be shown that all the names

related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence-eidas, arche, telos, energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject) aletheia, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.s Derrida could show this presence, but he need not, since it is clear that by definition Western thought is dominated by presence as the definition of being, hence the true and the real. The history of thought is the recording of the singular persistence with which our historical categories hide the truth from us by giving us the illusion that something has changed. From Derrida's perspective, then, the history of Western thought is far more than a footnote to Plato, as Whitehead once said. Insofar as Western thought is the recurrent history of the flight from indeterminacy, this history is Plato rewritten in various guises. Western thought is a history of logos that, with the arrival of deconstruction, only begins to appear as if it might someday come to closure.

As I suggested above, it is not really to the point to ask if this definition of being as presence has any historical use, or what would be the criteria for confirming the recurrence of the notion. It is apparent that being as presence is a tautological formulation. Like truth, being is either present or it isn't. With this unitary principle, Derrida formulates a tautology that can be applied in a sense to everything, once unitary presence is made the equivalent of, or identified with, whatever discourse Derrida wishes to deconstruct. Derrida is probably aware of the tautological nature of this principle. At least he finds Heidegger deriving conclusions from applied tautologies, as for instance in Heidegger's reading of metaphysics in Nietzsche. Derrida's reading is a marvel of ambiguity: When reading Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche it is possibly less a matter of suspecting the content of an interpretation than of an assumption or axiomatic structure. Perhaps the axiomatic structure of

metaphysics, inasmuch as metaphysics itself desires, or dreams, or imagines its own unity. A strange circle-an axiomatic structure that consequently demands an interpretation, one, gathered up, around a thinking unifying a unique text and, ultimately, the unique name for Being, for the experience of Being. With the value of the name this unity and this oneness mutually guard themselves against the dangers of dissemination.9 Typical of Derrida, it is not altogether clear if this description applies to Heidegger reading Nietzsche, Derrida reading Heidegger, or all of them reading some great text called "Metaphysics." In any case, in this hall of metaphysical mirrors, being as presence is a circular notion, functioning as the unitary principle that can explain anything. Derrida sees the principle here as a strategy against dissemination, or the play of meaning in which meaning is decentered, and being might be conceived as nonpresence. However, dissemination can be defined only by the negation of presence and centering, and thus dissemination is only the negative pole of the same tautological formulation: Truth is presence, or isn't; Being is presence, or isn't; discourse is centered, or isn't. This is a strange circle indeed, one that, like any unitary tautological principle, allows any inference to explain any and everything, and hence nothing.

Therefore, what interests us in this first axiom of deconstruction is not especially its historical accuracy, to wit, whether it is especially useful to say that Western thought has always used presence as the dominant model to conceive of the meaning of being and truth. This is true by definition-though it probably does not pragmatically apply to the historical world and its unfolding, beginning with the pre-Socratics. But once we accept this axiom, this definition of presence can be used as a first axiom that then orders a series of propositions about language and what we mean with language. In Derrida, as in other theorists, we find a

logically necessary proposition that seems to have some relationship to the empirical world-or define what we might mean by that world. Once we accept the definition set up by "Being as presence," an entire worldview emerges with this first axiom, though one that is perpetually disappearing from view as it is decentered by the theorist who plays with the negative and positive poles of the tautology.

Presence is set in opposition to absence, for by definition whatever is, is present or absent. This formulation is part of the tautological order declaring that whatever is, is the same or different. And difference as an active principle reappears yet again as a major character in this metaphysical allegory. Western thought, according to Derrida, relies upon only one side of the logical principle of the excluded middle when it comes to defining what is-which means that if one of two contradictory statements is denied, the other must be affirmed. To recapitulate: what is, is present; and what is not, is not, and is hence excluded from being and thus from truth. What is, is what ultimately is, which explains Derrida's above list of successive candidates for the supreme center: eidos or Plato's ideas, the God of Christian theology, man or the humanist center of discourse, aletheia or the truth of the philosopher and scientist, etc.

Concepts derived from historical use are reduced to one term of the tautological definition of being. History is nullified by definition. I am not sure if this is Derrida's intent, but it is certainly the logical effect of applying this unitary, tautological principle. Not unlike Freud's reducing 5 I all cultural phenomena to an expression of desire and the negation of desire, Derrida reduces all culture phenomena to the expression of metaphysical centering and the flight from dissemination, that is, the negation of the center.

The second move in deconstructive thought is to apply the unitary principle to a text to discover, not surprisingly, being as presence. This confirms that whatever really is, really is. Specifically, the move consists in defining any given text, from any historical period, as an expression of the unitary principle of presence-in spite of whatever might appear to be the historically dominant philosophy at any given moment. This application of the principle of presence consists in examining a seemingly historical text-one by Plato, Rousseau, Saussure, or LeviStrauss- and verifying that it encodes metaphysics. The unitary principle of being as presence always works so that every text will confirm it, and so it appears that there exists a definition of Western thought that decrees this law of identity "always and already" to be at work in Western thought.

Of course, all texts are always present-by definition. (One would be hard pressed to read them if they weren't.) The theorist then explains that indeterminacy of thought in the text has been avoided by appending to this "presence" an ultimate center so that presence and center are defined as the same. Having defined the unitary center to discourse as presence, Derrida can deconstruct his own unitary principle with an ingenuous critique. Derrida's critique of centered discourse turns upon his reading the contradictory nature of finding a center for logos, a center that can arrest what he calls the play of meaning. The contradiction lies in the fact that the center is always within discourse and, at the same time, without.

For example, Platonic ideas are a center to logos and language, which provide a stable realm of fixed meanings. Where are these Ideas located? They are, from Derrida's perspective, at once outside of language, in some metaphysical space, from where they control the play of meaning in language. And at the same time they are within

language, as concepts, as the signifieds that signs mean, so that we can identify the recurrence of signs and the recurrence of meanings. In the first part of Of Grammatology Derrida sums this up by saying that the outside is the inside. And with this deconstruction, Derrida seems to think that he has undone the law of identity-though the skeptic can point out that all he has done is play with the positive and negative poles of an identity statement.

The third move in deconstructive theory is to propose that we think in ways that valorize and affirm the negated term in the series of tautologies: we affirm play or dissemination instead of a center, absence instead of presence, or, in place of identity, nonidentity or difference. For the principle of difference, Derrida coins the term differance. The poststructuralist debt to structuralism is most apparent in this concept, for, in deconstructing Saussure, Derrida takes over part and parcel most of the linguist's notions about language, even as Derrida shows they are rooted in metaphysical concepts. Heidegerian that he is, Derrida especially highlights Saussure's unwieldy notion that all meaning is differential in nature. Like chess pieces held together on a chessboard by rules that exist only to define differences, words arc combined in language on a playground of difference. Words are not centers for meaning but have meaning only by differing from other words as they defer to other terms that can define them. This is what Derrida means by differance, a term whose a cannot be differentiated by either spoken French or English. It can only be seen in writing, the valorization of which is another aspect of Derrida's reversing positive and negative terms. Since its beginnings, metaphysics had identified presence with speech, so Derrida affirms writing over speech, for differance must be written to have its full meaning.

Critics have suggested analogies with Hegel's philosophy for this play of negation and affirmation. Hegelian dialectic might seem to be a precedent for Derrida's example. For example, Mihai Spariosu says deconstruction is an operation that is symmetrical to Hegelian sublimation: While in Hegel the originally privileged term recuperates its opposite, in Derrida the originally underprivileged term is rehabilitated and becomes the condition of the possibility of the opposition itself. In this sense one has a hard time seeing Derrida's concept of "reinscription" and "displacement" as being more than a logical operation and, therefore, a reaffirmation of (Western) differential and integrative modes of thought. 10 Spariosu points up here the very basic difference between Hegelian dialectic and Derrida's deconstruction. There is no history "present" in Derrida's work because Derrida's conceptual oppositions are basically logical operations playing with analytical notions. Nor, in their logical structure, do they accomplish any more than simply negating one half of the tautology. Hegel clearly anticipates the Derridian play with a priori tautologies, for Hegel is the muddled master in working out the logical implications of analytical thought. Yet in Hegel, history emerges from the dialectic in which mind reveals itself to itself in an enormous retrospective elaboration of the simple tautology, "What is, is." Derrida has been drawn to Hegel's work not simply because Hegel has written the great epic of Western metaphysics but because Derrida must defend himself against being taken as a rather watered-down caricature of the German master of logical error.

r i 5 I For purposes of literary theory, the skeptical theorist can recognize that Derrida's logical operations are not without interest insofar as Derrida is a supremely clever reader of the texts he sets out to deconstruct. He has an uncanny knack for finding conceptual weaknesses in the text~ he reads. In Of Grammatology, for example, Derrida

finds an immediate contradiction in Saussure's definitions. On the one hand, Saussure, fulminating with irrational hostility, denigrates writing. On the other hand, Saussure's definition of the signifier should indifferently apply to any material embodiment of the signified so that speech and writing are equivalent representations of the linguistic system. Derrida is quick to find here another example of metaphysics. The metaphysical tradition, since at least Plato's Phaedrus, has relegated writing to a secondary role when compared to speech. The inferior status granted writing as a mere representation of speech is what Derrida calls phonocentrism. Derrida wants moreover to show that metaphysics must maintain that writing is merely an exterior representation having no essential link with the center of language, that is, with speech conceived as logos present unto itself. If speech were to lose this privilege, then metaphysical thought would be hard pressed to claim that being is always presence. Therefore, writing must be relegated to an inferior status, for it is a mere representation of the locus of truth. In brief, writing imitates voice.

The skeptic might point out that writing is just as "present" as speech, but that would end the deconstructive move. Derrida must read Saussure against Saussure. Saussure's signified is a position in a space that can be differentially cut up by any signifier, whether written, spoken, or beat out with bumblebee wings. If he had been consistent with himself, Saussure would have seen that the definition of the differential nature of the sign means that sound or phone can have no privileges. Derrida sees in this inconsistency that Saussure's need to maintain a center for discourse led him to a contradiction that continues the curse cast upon writing. In fact, according to Derrida, Saussure's very definition of the linguistic sign shows his work is inscribed in the tradition of Western metaphysics, however much Saussure's doctrine of differential nature of meaning might

revolutionize that definition. Linguistics remains tributary to metaphysics, the final proof of which Derrida adduces by quoting linguist Roman Jakobson's approving discussion of the Saussurian definition of the sign. Saussure's concept simply updates the Stoic definition: The signatum always referred, as to its referent, to a res, to an entity created or at any rate first thought and spoken, thinkable and speakable, in the eternal present of the divine logos and specifically in its breath. If it came to relate to the speech of a finite being (created or not; in any case an intracosmic entity) through the intermediary of a signans, the signatum had an immediate relationship with the divine logos which thought it within presence and for which it was not a trace. I I Against this metaphysical definition of the sign, Derrida can draw upon the Saussurian model of the differential determination of signs. This definition breaks all contact with a transcendental sphere and inscribes differance into language. All signifieds exist differentially, and, as difference, each signified contains within it the traces of all the other signifieds that allow it to be different from them. This most uneconomical definition lies at the heart of what Derrida then puts forward as the idea that all language has meaning because of the absent-present traces of the entire differential system. By definition, of course, every sign is different from every other sign. Derrida takes this tautology to mean that every sign bears the trace in it of every sign that it is not. This is another Hegelian word-game, one that some literary theorists find interesting for the freedom it gives them. With this principle in hand, Humpty Dumpty claimed comparable freedom: every word can be meant by every other word.

Derrida is attentive to the fact that Saussure's thought is nonrnetaphysical insofar as it defines the conceptual realm of language as one mapped out by a given linguistic system: there is no conceptual realm preexisting the actualized

linguistic system. And Derrida is right to ask what the various signifieds refer to that, within the system, might allow them to be called the same signified, however they are materially manifested. How do I know that voiced "dog" is the same as written "dog" and that these are the same as "dog" in Morse code or as the icon in a guide book saying that the barking beast is or is not allowed into a hotel? Saussure's difficulty probably lies in a definition that separates signified and signi - fier: metaphysics may well enter into this separation. But a sign can be defined in several successful ways; for example, one can define identities in terms of constraining rules of use. Or one can, with all equanimity, accept the necessity of metaphysics. In any case, there is little doubt that, given his unitary principle of being as presence, Derrida will find metaphysics everywhere.

Nonetheless, Derrida's response to his reading of Saussure is puzzling.

Having shown the inconsistency involved in Saussure's elevation of speech over writing, Derrida utilizes the denigrated term in order to promote a definition that is the mirror opposite of what he has deconstructed. Language is not basically speech. It is more like writing.

Every signifier manifests a signified that is found in the realm of l 5 I "archewriting." "Arche" designates origins, so that the nonoriginating origins of language are found in a form of writing. Archewriting is the system of traces that constitutes the differential relations making up a language. This is all more or less coherent but also rather disappointing.

Archewriting is a neologism emphasizing difference, for it is essentially another way of defining the play of definitions

that Derrida sees characterizing language. If one finds differance to be an uneconomical notion in the first place, then one will probably find that archewriting is an unnecessary complication of a uneconomical tautology. Or, even more damning, archewriting and its system of traces can be interpreted as merely a reverse mirror image of the logos that Derrida wants to deconstruct in the first place. What is archewriting if not a transcendental concept granting meaning from a position exterior to real language? Derrida's own example does indeed demonstrate the difficulty of getting rid of metaphysics … or perhaps that metaphysics resists deconstruction because some of it is quite useful.

For literary theory, there is a double edge to Derrida's work. On the one hand, his poststructuralism has generated new concepts about writing and language, especially through Derrida's reading Saussure against Saussure. The most notable of these concepts is differance. With this neologism, Derrida coined a term that many theorists have taken as a key to defining a new practice of reading texts based on a new understanding of the ontology of writing. Literature is defined as a system of signs functioning differentially in opposition to other signs. Like all signs, literary signs depend on deferring and referring to other signs for their meaning. Signs function diacritically through their differences, so that meaning is also engaged in movement toward other signs, and so signs perpetually defer. Using this concept, theorists have transformed literature or literary language into a subset of language. The literary sign always sends us toward something other than itself, toward those other literary signs whose traces it bears. Differance is the foundation of a theory of intertextuality. And literary theory becomes the theory of those texts that perpetually mean something other than what we think they mean-at least

when taken to its most Quixotic extreme by Derrida's disciples.

The other edge of the Don Quixote's sword is deconstruction as a practice, or a practice in theory. This practice obliges the theorist to find the point in a given literary text where the play of differance is such that one cannot decide what the meaning might be. As a practice, deconstruction means interpreting the text as a self-referential loop that allows the genesis of paradox, contradiction, and what deconstructive theorists call undecidability. This is not what is meant when ordinary critics say that literary texts are ambiguous, paradoxical, or contradictory, for ambiguity or paradox is simply the aesthetic intention of many literary texts. Polysemy, to use an abstruse structuralist term, is part of any critical frame of reference. Undecidability works against the aesthetic intention of the text. By defining literature as a product of differance-and perhaps all written texts can be so defined-differance supposedly undermines the centered meaning that the metaphysics of presence assigns to them. Metaphysics is deceitful in that it makes us think we can find decidable meanings-which is already a rather eccentric notion, since we recognize in practice that we only propose probable meanings. Passons.

One of Derrida's most celebrated examples of undecidability is the example he offers of a sentence written by Nietzsche, found in quotation marks in an unpublished manuscript: "I have forgotten my umbrella."12 Derrida's play with possible meanings that the sentence might have is supposed to show that this sentence is afflicted by the undecidability of meaning that characterizes all, even ordinary language. This demonstration will probably not impress the analytically minded philosopher who, with a shrug of the shoulders, will point out that Derrida has not taken into account Frege' s distinction of Sinn and Bedeutung, of meaning and

reference, or use. We all understand the meaning of Nietzsche's sentence, but we have no clue as to its reference. With no context or language game in which to put the sentence, it can only serve as a token for deconstructive wordplay, which is the frame of reference Derrida has imposed on the sentence. The analytically minded critic will point out that the only problem involved with Nietzsche's sentence is found in the desire of a reader who thinks a sentence could have more than probable semantic meaning (Sinn) without a context.

To pursue the question of undecidability from an analytic perspective, the skeptic can also ask why Derrida and his disciples import a term from formal logic and number theory in order to say that ordinary language may have several or an indefinite number of meanings. Undecidability takes its technical meaning from Godel' s demonstration that no formal system is complete within itself. Is Derrida suggesting that the "system" of language is comparable to a formal system such as that proposed by the Principia Mathematica of Russell and Whitehead? This does not seem to be the case, unless language can be formalized as a mathematical or logical system. Derrida does not seem to believe that, and his intellectual coquetry in his choice of terms seems dictated by a kind of metaphorical fantasy. GOdel discovered that formal systems could be construed as talking about themselves by introducing self-reference into the system though a coding system; and with this he could introduce all 5 I the paradoxes that self-referentiality entails, to wit, that A and -A can both be true when a theorem designates itself.

Introducing self-referentiality into a system means that the paradox of the Cretan liar has become part of the system. Consider the Cretan who says, "All Cretans are liars." If true, it is false. Or to borrow a borrowing that Douglas Hofstadter

uses in Metamagical Themas, "The selfreplicating ideas are conspiring to enslave our minds." This example of paranoid self-reference, which seems to apply to deconstruction, should cause us to reject it if it is true. 13 As every student of logic knows, when accepted as an axiom, contradictions and paradoxes allow the deduction of anything, for undecidability follows automatically from selfreferentiality once one has stipulated that a text is self-referential in a paradoxical way.

Literary deconstruction declares that every literary text, in addition to whatever else it may be, is a self-referential text. For a concrete example, Derrida's follower J. Hillis Miller and his anthologized essay "The Critic as Host" are very useful, for the arbitrary nature of the procedure is clear in this essay. To set up the systematic production of contradiction, Miller declares, by fiat, that metaphoricity is the law of all language. If everything is a metaphor for everything and anything else, then he has produced the conditions of self-referentiality necessary for paradox.

Therefore: there is no conceptual expression without figure, and no inrertwining concept and figure without an implied narrative …. Deconstruction is an investigation of what is implied by this inherence in one another of figure, concept, and narrative. 14 All is figural. This is another version of dif.ferance. Everything in the text is a metaphor for everything else, deferring to everything found in the dictionary. (And, as Miller shows, reading a dictionary is a prerequisite for deconstruction.) If all can figure everything else, then all is tautology.

Every word is (metaphorically) every other word in the infinite play of that philosophical active principle, differance.

Equipped with principles that even Humpty Dumpty might envy, Miller turns to deconstruct Shelley's poem The Triumph of Life. This is a romantic poem that many readers might think is "about" love, among many other things. The doctrine of differance and metaphor shows, however, that a poem about love must also be a poem about itself: Lovemaking and poetrymaking are not, however, stark opposites in Shelley .

. . . Each is, so to speak, the dramatization of the other or the figure of it. This is an elliptical relation in which whichever of the two the reader focuses on reveals itself to be the metaphorical substitution of the other. The other, however, when the reader moves to it, is not the "original" but a figure of what at first seemed a figure for it. (465) The play of substitution means that the poem is self-referential, for it is always a figure of itself and something else that in turn figures it. And this "movement" leads to the undecidable, since one cannot determine what anchors what: everything can mean everything. This is a conclusion generated by the paradox, "This poem means itself and not itself." A and -A are affirmed, and anything can be proved. The poem could just as well be about garbage cans or albino midgets.

Miller seems to think that this paradox is part of the general protocol of reading. At least, this is the drama of reading he sees deconstruction enacting when it refuses "decidability": The undecidable, nevertheless, always has an impetus back into some covert form of dialectical movement. … This is constantly countered, however, by the experience of movement in place. The momentary always tends to generate a narrative of the impossibility of narrative, the impossibility of getting from here to there by means of language. The tension between dialectic and undecidability is another way in which this form of criticism remains open,

in the ceaseless movement of an "in place of' without resting place. (467) To this praise of illogic and contradiction, the only reply is that some language is self-reflexive but most isn't; some is tautological and metaphorical but a great deal isn't. Or, as Wittgenstein might retort, look and you see what's there. Multiple are the protocols of reading and making sense, and this single-minded application of the allegory of differance is, finally, as arbitrary as it is simple-minded. The generalized notion of undecidability has little application to the texts and language we encounter in the world-though sometimes it does, as in Kafka or Robbe-Grillet.

Poststructuralism's antihumanist agenda, the agenda shared by Heidegger and Foucault, Barthes and Lacan, is also central to Derrida's work, though in a less strident way. The metaphysical determinations of the subject are denounced by Derrida, though it is not clear what he thinks we can do without them. It is clear that Derrida does not share the humanist belief that the self is, in its mastery of language, master of its intellectual destiny. The wiles of presence demand the deconstruction of the self. If the self exists, it must exist, by definition, as present to itself; for, Derrida asks, how can a self know itself if it is not present to itself? 5 I This kind of tautological reasoning is foregrounded in the following passage from his essay in Marges entitled "La Differance": Can one conceive a presence and a subject's presence to itself before speech or its representative, a presence to self of the subject in an intuitive and silent state of consciousness? 15 A fair question, to which the answer would seemingly be yes. Not only various human states of consciousness but animal states of consciousness would all correspond to this state. This is a matter of empirical observation.

But if one defines consciousness to be coincident with selfconsciousness, and then defines this metaconsciousness as a linguistic operation, then the answer is, tautologically, no. One cannot conceive of a consciousness that is defined as language without the presence of language. This a priori definition is used to justify the definition of presence as the model used by consciousness as it thinks itself: Now, what is consciousness, What does "consciousness" mean? [NB: an empirical question then becomes a question of definition. A.T.] Most often, in the usual form of "intending to mean" [vouloir-dire], it gives itself to be thought, under all its modifications, only as presence to self, as selfperception of presence. And what is true here about consciousness is true of so-called subjective existence in general. (17) Aristotle's ousia becomes modern subjectivity, and the self is a curious illusion that exists only thanks to metaphysics. Or, if named the unconscious by Freud, it is still metaphysics: it is nonpresence (21), which is the same thing as presence in the worldview of deconstruction.

Derrida brings us to the point, an interesting point, where we may finally decide that all metaphysical questions are simply analytical matters. The closure of the era of metaphysics may simply entail that we say, Metaphysics is over, for what we have been considering metaphysics is simply definitions that we are hard pressed to do without. For the test of a definition is whether we can use it. And then we shall go on about our business of living, reading texts, and wondering how and what they mean. Literary theory may have performed a useful service by showing that pure tautologies can rapidly become metaphysics or antimetaphysics: it is all the same thing. But without proper critical attention to these tautologies, we begin to use them to build worldviews that take on a life of their own. We need useful tautologies to serve as the framework of discourse. And if they are defined as metaphysics, I suppose we can

finally be grateful to Derrida for showing us-malgre Jui-that living with metaphysics is no more harmful to our health than living with the dictionary. However, our dictionary is not a repository of logos but simply the historical accretion of the uses we have made of language as the language has evolved. It is no more "centered" than any other product of evolution.

Concluding Remarks

"Now you tell me, please," said Alice, "what that means?" "Now you talk like a reasonable child," said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. "I meant by 'impenetrability' that we've had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you'd mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don't mean to stop here all the rest of your life." "That's a great deal to make one word mean," Alice said in a thoughtful tone.

Having made this grand tour of the conceptual labyrinths underlying most of the theories ofliterature in vogue today, we may ask ourselves if the trip was worth the effort. Did we bring any knowledge back from the voyage? Taking a strictly scientific point of view, with rigorous epistemological standards, the skeptic will probably conclude that much of literary theory involves excessively complicated models that are naive, when not duplicitous about their status as knowledge. The most severe critic will opine in addition that theory's claims for knowledge are hyperbolic aggrandizements of what can be derived from often trivial tautologies. And the practical critic may suggest that literary theory often seems to have precious little to do with literature. With some sarcasm, the practical skeptic might point out that we have just finished a book on theories

about literature in which very little has been said about literature.

In fact, this entire book could probably be recast without one concrete example of a literary text being mentioned-except perhaps when considering Freud, who transformed a tragedy into a theory. It is difficult to imagine a theory of geology that does not mention the Rockies or the Atlantic, or a theory of evolution that has no need to speak of, among other things, specific procaryotes, fishes, or that species of hominoid that is supposedly sapiens.

Philosopher Hilary Putnam reports that in a conversation with the linguist Chomsky, Chomsky told him that what is wrong with most 155 philosophers is that they take perfectly sensible continua and get in trouble by trying to convert them into dichotomies. I Theorists use dichotomies to generate the tautologies that give the impression that experience has been forced into an either/or mold that must, by definition, hold true of the world. The powerful illusion of truth created by polar tautologies gives rise in turn to the belief that pure rational exercises in definition can encompass the totality of what can be thought.

This belief is buttressed by the logical confusion that, because truth depends upon a language for its expression, language vouchsafes truth, reality, world, being, or whatever honorific term the theorist highlights in his attempt to found a worldview congenial to his ethical needs or emotive elan. Language offers totalization through tautologies that must cover everything. As Putnam says in the same lecture, though we cannot specify facts without specifying the language of these facts, it is a hopeless dream to suppose we can find a "Universal Relation" between a (supposed) totality of all facts and an arbitrary true sentence in an arbitrary language (40).

Literary theory, as it has taken shape in recent years, is hardly the first historical attempt to generate knowledge by spinning out totalizing tautologies. Without going back to scholasticism, the historical-minded critic can find a comparable movement occurring after Kant and his revolution in epistemology made critical empiricism the dominant philosophy of the scientific and philosophical communities. Unable to compete with the epistemological successes of contemporary science, today's literary theory is not unlike German idealism of the nineteenth century in its reaction to Kant: pure abstract thought was taken to be capable of ordering the world and revealing absolute truth. Along with the idealism of the poets, Schelling's and Hegel's philosophical idealism is at the origins of much theoretical thinking today. The analogy with these thinkers points to one conclusion to be drawn from this historical antecedent. Literary theory is probably about to implode upon itself. Like the theorizing of idealism, there is no further development to which most literary theory today could give rise, and it seems increasingly out of phase with the epistemological developments we find in most other disciplines.

This is not to say that today's literary theory will disappear overnight, for it supplies much of the methodology that goes into the interpretive work by which critics and teachers of literature earn a living. I recall the distinction between theory and interpretation: in this book, I have been concerned with theory as knowledge, not with the interpretations that theory might enable. Interpretations can be better than the theoretical framework that are used to frame them. For interpretation is more like an 1 art form than a science; it is usually an individual act of performance that generates meanings in function of a critical framework that the criticreader uses to create meaning. Critical and theoretical frameworks are multiple, as multiple as the meanings that critics and readers find in the literary texts

that are springboards for their performance. Critics and good readers are by nature tolerant of multiple readings. This tolerance explains undoubtedly in part why much theory has found acceptance in the university. The natural pluralism of reading has abetted a tolerance of theories that, unlike interpretations, claim to be knowledge-but I doubt that the confusion of interpretation, ideology, and knowledge is likely to continue to be granted great tolerance. Many academic pursuits that have tried to use literary theory to endow themselves with epistemological models-feminism, defense and investigation of minority interests, or the exploration of ethics-do not need epistemological confusion to exist as centers of inquiry. And if some ideologies profit from confusion, this is hardly to be encouraged.

Nor is this to say that a priori analytical discourse or tautological models are useless. On the contrary: theoretical models, functioning as deductive axioms, can be springboards that lead to empirically confirmed regularities in the world. But the general failure of literary theory to establish any links between model and empirical confirmation has meant that most literary theories have become elaborate, self-sustaining, verbal constructs designed to promote various ideologies in the name of "theory." The attempt to anchor ideology and ethics in supposedly scientific or, tautologically, antiscientific models is not new, but the contemporary scene is perhaps unique in the number of competing interest groups that have made hyperbolic claims for theory as they seek to promote their interests.

Logical confusions aside, my main charge against the a priori models and ideology of literary theory is finally that no criteria for verification are proposed. Tautological asseveration is all too often the only form of demonstration that the theorists propose. It may or may not be difficult to

find criteria for what constitutes confirmation of a literary theory, and hence for what constitutes knowledge. But the difficulty of finding criteria hardly entails that there is no such thing as valid knowledgewhich all too many contemporary theorists assert with a self-defeating glibness. And if there is no possibility in literary theory for valid knowledge, then theorists should cash in their chips and go elsewhere to earn an honest living. Moreover, mere community acceptance does not constitute the validity of a theory. If it did, then the Nazis had their valid knowledge, and so does every racist fraternity on campus. Moreover, the irrationalism that denies validity confuses the pluralism of valid inquiry with the impossibilily of valid knowledge. Often behind this irrational ism, which derives Lhc impossibility of knowledge from the plurality of approaches to knowledge, lies a thirst for a single simple and totalizing truth that would explain everything. There is more than a little scholasticism in much of the god-hungry ideology of literary studies.

And the whip is often close at hand in many of these self-flagellant defenses of irrationalism.

There are several frameworks of validation available to the humanities and the social sciences. With regard specifically to literature, the rational empiricist suspects that inferential models for literature that attempt to be massively empirical are to be preferred to deductive models that apply abstractly to everything, and thus to nothing. Roland Barthes once despaired about the number of narratives one might have to study to arrive at any valid induction-but this should rather be a cause of pleasure than despair. (And Barthes's own rejection of his all-embracing structuralism was motivated by a pluralistic hedonism that is the sign of a sound mind.) The recent work in poetics of once-upon-a-time structuralists Jike Gerard Genette seems to point to a

recognition that any future theory of literature will owe some allegiance to works of literature, many works of literature, for any general model must bring us back to a world of many literary texts.

Analytical models that define areas of inquiry can be welcomed if they present themselves as heuristic instruments that may help us organize our experience of literature and the world that exists through literature. We have had enough ideological worldviews masquerading as science. Let us frame models that may help us discover new relations in literature-and that may indeed affect our worldview. But the discovery of new relations must be subject to some empirical confirmation about which there can be some degree of consensus. The mere acceptance by a community does not constitute validity, but valid inquiry means that more than one mind sees the validity of the model. Discovery means empirical confirmation in terms of public criteria.

The catastrophic weakness of much literary theory is not simply its failure to offer any criteria for validating the tautological definitions that underpin its models. Much literary theory has real contempt for the demands of validation. This contempt is part of an ideology that is fearful of science but is ashamed to admit the anti-intellectualism that underlies its intellectual poverty. Science is, of course, limited in what it can say about the world, and literary theorists want to say much. Tautologies purport to say something about the world, and the skill required to manipulate them can give the impression that something extraordinary about the world is being said. This manipulation is part of the literary intellectual' s will to power, it is part of the theorist's desire to fabricate a coherent worldview. Moreover, imaginary concepts have

great power to allay anxieties, which is also a function of ideology, as well as myth and religion.

Literary theory often seems to work much by incantation. Constant repetition of our tautologies produces the impression that the world is explained by them. I speak from the experience of having listened to the siren song of theory: if repeated often enough, concepts like class consciousness, the unconscious, the play of differance seem to be confirmed. They work in our speech and writings, after all, to order coherent propositions. And these propositions can be used in order to deduce other propositions that make up a worldview, so that finally they offer the belief that one has some power over the world by using these propositions.

The question then is what is the difference between these incantatory concepts and the operative concepts that we use to define the world and which give us access to a world? The difference I think is in the context in which we use definitions. Consider a pair of simple examples of types of scientific definitions and how they function. First, plant systematics offers a good example of the tug between definitions and the real existence of properties in the world of plants that are accounted for by the definitions that make up the taxa that categorize plants. Systematics is characterized by an open and ongoing struggle to make definitions fit what one sees in the world: to find definitions that join together taxa that are defined by an indefinite number of criteria, such as the features of morphology, physiology, and genetics. In a sense, only species are "real," and every higher level of taxonomy-family, order, class, phylum-is a verbal definition that can be accepted only insofar as it successfully orders the categories that are entailed by it. But the messy world of plants is organized by systematics, and constantly reorganized by it. I doubt that there are more types of literary works than plants. And that

suggests some interesting ideas for theory, not least of which would be an understanding of literary genres in real, evolutionary terms.

To offer a second example, that most empirical of all sciences, chemistry, offers its system of weights and measurements that depends on an interplay between definition and empirical use of definition. Every beginner in chemistry must ponder how, in learning measurements (or stoichiometry), the atomic mass of an element is its average mass compared to the mass of a 12C atom defined as having a mass of twelve atomic measurement units. A carbon-12 atom really having exactly twelve atomic mass units (amu) does not exist, but all atomic mass measurements are measured with reference to this a priori definition.

And it works, since everything can be measured by it, including all the carbon atoms that don't quite have twelve amu. A priori definitions do have a place in the world.

I bring up these concrete examples to point out that all science, probably all knowledge, entails using definitions that provide linkages between language and the world. Literary theorists would do well to look at various sciences and take note of the various criteria that arc used for these linkages. All too often theorists show their knowledge of science by quoting Heisenberg to the effect that quantum mechanics introduces indeterminacy into ... quantum mechanics. And with this less-than-illuminating reference, they then go on to rant about power, class consciousness, and the unconscious as if these entities were walking down the street for all to view.

Much literary theory purports to be working to overcome metaphysics.

In the wake of Nietzsche and especially Heidegger, theorists believe that modem science is just a branch of Western metaphysics. Ergo their task is to overcome science. Another book is needed at this point, but I will ask a question. Does the task of overcoming metaphysics mean the rejection of those principles that give rise to belief in things beyond nature (meta-physis); or does this mean overcoming those a priori principles of thought that allow the heuristic exploration and, when confirmed, organization of a world? The first project is one that deconstruction and positivism could have united in; the second is an attack on rationality.

The confusion of the nature of the two projects seems typical of literary theory. But what is more remarkable is that in its rejection of metaphysics, theory is then guilty of inventing uncaused causalities that are supposed to explain effects in the world. Magical homologies abound in literary theory, effecting causal joinings between text and infrastructure, writing and the unconscious, history and voice, system and text, power and practice. One can concur with Heidegger that the principle of sufficient reason is a metaphysical principle that leads us from effects back to first causes. This principle leads to the most metaphysical of entities, the first cause, or the Deity of Christian metaphysics. But the magical causalities of literary theory seem to be designed to make Christian metaphysics seem plausible. The followers of Heidegger, Derrida, and others bent on overcoming metaphysics are theorists who rejoice in new definitions that are as metaphysical as the terms they wish to overcome. Heidegger's Ereignis or Unter-schied, updated as Derrida's dijferance or archewriting, seem to be mirror images of metaphysical notions. Any student with a passing acquaintance with Hume, not to mention Rabelais or Moliere, could see that these are mere linguistic notions endowed magically with creative powers.

Literary theory must turn to what is the case-to paraphrase the Wittgenstein who didn't-if literature and literary studies are to lay claim to the venerable role to which, I think, they are entitled. Which is to allow students to address human concerns in a world about which they have little reason to be optimistic. For purposes of employment and political correctness, students today, some students at any rate, learn the game of theory, but the ideological posturing that literary theory usually entails is really the death of intellectual seriousness. The caricature is reached in the jejune ideological stance claiming that subversion is the goal of all theory and that to this end theory must be proclaimed a fiction.

Much theory is indeed a fiction. It is the product of the imagination and offers an imaginary worldview that touches our world only tangentially.

Judged as fictions, theories can be amusing, even aesthetically pleasing and ethically grandiose, though a bit passe when considered as a post- 1960s apocalypse now. According to recent theory, since the 1960s we have outgrown the need for "master thinkers." But the fact that we continue to seek them out speaks, I suppose, to a continuing need for masters to tell us we don't need them. Or perhaps theory now fills a need that great novels once fulfilled. In which case we are in need of a contemporary Cervantes to show us the difference between theory, fiction, and the world, for the Quixotes of theory don't always have the distinction quite straight. Lacking that work, however, one could always do well to tum to the original Don Quixote as a postmodern primer for an introduction to literary theory.

Notes

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5: Poststructuralism 1. Jacques Lacan, De la psychose paranoi'a£jue dans ces rapports avec la personnalite (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980), 49.

2. Jacques Lacan, Les quatre concepts fondarnentaux de la pyschanalyse (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), 26.

3. Jacques Lacan, Ecrits (Paris: Collection Points, 1970), 1 :251.

4. Jacques Lacan, Ecrits (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), 284.

5. Ibid.

6. Stephen Gaukroger, "Theories of Meaning and Literary Theory," in On Literary Theory and Philosophy, ed. Richard Freadman and Lloyd Reinhardt (New York: St.

Martin's Press, 1991), 172.

7. Jacques Lacau, Le moi dans la theorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978), 245.

8. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," in Critical Theory since 1965, ed.

Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1985), 85.

9. Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadarner-Derrida Encounter, ed. Diana P.

Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 67-68.

10. Mihai Spariosu, "Mimesis and Contemporary French Theory," in Mimesis in Contemporary Theory, ed. Mihai Spariosu (Philadelphia: John Benjamin, 1984), 78.

11. Jacques Derrida, Of Grmnmatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 73.

12. Jacques Derrida, Eperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 103- 18.

13. Richard Hofstadter, Metmnagical Themas (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 56. I acknowledge here my reliance on Hofstadter for a guide to Gade!, especially in his wonderfully playful Godel, Escher, Bach (New York: Vintage Books, 1980). A more condensed guide is to be found in Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, Godel's Proof(New York: New York University Press, 1958).

14. J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in Critical Theory Since 1965.

15. Jacques Derrida, "La Differancc," in Marges de la philosophie, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972), 17. The essay is also included in Critical Theory since 1965. In anticipation of the thoughtful reader's question, I add incidentally that, yes, I do use this anthology to teach a course on literary theory for students who cannot read French and German, which is lo say, nearly all of our students interested in literary theory.

Concluding Remarks l. Hilary Putnam, The Many Faces of Realism (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Press, 1987), 36.

A Bibliographic Essay: How to Get Started on Literary Theory

The best texts of literary theory are, like literary texts themselves, inimitable. Moreover, if I have made my point in this study, literary theory is not scientific in nature, and resumes and explanatory essays about literary theory rarely capture the persuasive power of the original theoretical writing. Therefore, I strongly recommend that anyone interested in theory go first to the original texts upon which theories are based, since the power of theoretical persuasion of these texts is found precisely in their language. Secondary sources can then be useful for situating what is at stake in the theorists' writing-or, as I have argued, for a better understanding of the power of tautology that lies therein.

However, the beginning reader who has made it to the end of this study might find it helpful to have a guide for beginners in hand. To this end, I recommend Peter Barry's Beginning Theory (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). There is virtue in simplification, and this book is the true beginning book-much more so than the usually recommended Literary Theory by Terry Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) (or various works by Robert Scholes or Jonathan Culler). It also gives bibliographical tips for theories I have not gone into.

It is also true that anthologies of literary theory can be quite useful for the beginning as well as advanced reader. Anthologies allow multiple encounters and cross-readings based on the perspicacious insight of the editors. Hazard

Adams and Leroy Searle's Critical Theory since 1965 (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1986) has served me well in various contexts. Many of my colleagues also use R. C. Davis's Contemporary Literary Criticism (New York: Longman, 1989). The British have also edited several other anthologies (see Barry).

A true beginning means of course engaging the beginnings, and it is really hard to imagine a neophyte coming to grips with theory without 167 first having pondered some of the intricacies of Plato and Aristotle, especially those found in Plato's The Republic and Aristotle's Poetics.

The handy paperback Classical Literary Criticism, edited by T. S.

Dorsch (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), gives a good edition of Aristotle as well as Horace and Loginus, and the even handier Oxford paperback with the same title, edited by D. A Russell and M. Winterbottom (New York: Oxford, 1989), gives relevant excerpts from Plato's Republic as well as Aristotle's Poetics and several other classical texts. One might complete this quick grounding in the classics with Monroe C. Beardsley's Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History (New York: Macmillan, 1966). This overview can bring one right up to the roots of modem theory: Karl Marx.

Modem theory begins with a theorist who was not especially interested in literature, and it is not easy to find a text by Marx that deals specifically or at length with literature. There have been several anthologies of Marx and Engels on art or on literature or, more generally, on aesthetics. None of them are especially interesting. For anyone wanting to know the power of Marxist thought, it is probably best to plunge into one of the several editions of The Communist Manifesto

or The German Ideology (New York: International Publishers, 1947). This can be a tonic experience. Anthologies of general Marxist selections can also be stimulating: for example, T. B. Bottomore's selections from Marx's Early Writings and his choices in Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy (both New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). After some mastery of Marx's polemical visions of ideology, one can then turn to the modern writers referred to in my chapter on Marxism. For more bibliography on the subject, one can also consult Philip Godstein, The Politics of Theory: An Introduction to Marxist Criticism (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1990), or Terry Eagleton's Marxism and Literary Criticism (London: Methuen, 1976). The most influential English-language Marxist whom I did not discuss here is Raymond Williams. His thought is perhaps best illustrated by his Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Marxist theorists can be interesting in their own right. Curiously, this seems to be much less the case with Freudian theorists, and therefore I have based my discussion in this book almost entirely upon Freud's own work. Of course, Freud had a theory of literature, as well as of every other cultural phenomenon. Before turning to Freud's works on literature and art, however, initiates in Freudian metapsychology can get an overview of the Freudian system by reading the very last work Freud wrote, The Outline of Psychoanalysis (available, as are most of the standard works, as a Norton paperback). Then one can turn to the canonical Bibliographic Essay 169 works used for building a theory of literature, such as On Dreams, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, or Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood. Freud is a masterful writer, at times a subtle moralist and at times a coy charlatan. In short, no Freudian I have read is more interesting than Freud. However, for an illustration of a variety of modem approaches, and for

bibliographies on different topics, one can consult the essays in Maurice Charney and Joseph Reppen's Psychoanalytical Approaches to Literature and Film (Cranbury, NJ.: Associated University Presses, 1987).

Hermeneutics and historicism present other problems for an initiation.

At the present moment, it seems safe to say that Michel Foucault is the most important theorist in this regard. Foucault is a clear, if demanding, writer, and anyone interested in historicism is well advised to turn directly to his most important books, Madness and Civilization (New York: Random House, 1965), or his The Order of Things (New York: Pantheon, 1970). Unfortunately, the former is a truncated version of the original Folie et deraison: Histoire de lafolie a !'age classique (Paris: Plon, 1961). With regard to historicism viewed from the hermeneutic perspective, Heidegger is the thinker with whom one should begin. I have never, however, found an easy way to introduce Heidegger. One can jump right into Being and Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), though even the philosophically sophisticated may have trouble with this initiation into the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger invents his own language, and he demands patience and a poetic sense of the power of tautological thinking. More directly pertaining to literature are Heidegger's essays in Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), especially "The Origin of the Work of Art." For secondary material, I offer my own essay on Heidegger in Words in Reflection (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), though the beginner might get more out of George Steiner's elegant essay, Martin Heidegger (New York: Viking Press, 1978). For more bibliography on both theorists, see essays on Foucault and on hermeneutics in G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow's Contemporary Literary Theory (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989). This

is a good collection of advanced introductory essays on all the topics dealt with here, and it contains good bibliographies.

The starting point for structuralism is clearly the linguist Saussure, and every would-be structuralist must digest his Course in General Linguistics (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), or preferably the edition by Tullio de Mauro of the Cours de linguistique generate (Paris: Payot, 1978).

After that, there are many varieties of structuralism and semiotics.

Terence Hawke's Structuralism and Semiotics (Berkeley: University of California, 1978) can point out some directions to take, as can Jonathan Culler's Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). A more recent bibliography is also available in Atkins and Morrow's Contemporary Literary Theory (see above). My personal preference among structuralists goes to Roland Barthes, and much pleasure is to be had reading either the selections in Image-Music-Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) or the anthology that Susan Sontag has put together, A Barthes Reader (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

Poststructuralism of the Lacanian variety builds upon Freud and Saussure, whereas, for an understanding of what is at stake in deconstruction, the Derridian type of poststructuralism presupposes Heidegger and Saussure.

It is really useless to try to understand either Lacan or Derrida until the presupposed reading is in place. (I know: I remember picking up Derrida's Of Grammatology some years ago and, despite graduate work in philosophy, but with no Saussure, I didn't understand much of it at all!) Lacan's work is divided between the essays published as

Ecritsessays he wrote for publication-and his seminars, or courses that he taught and for which the notes students took are now transcribed. A selection of the Ecrits (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977) is available in English, though the entire corpus is only available in French (Paris: Seuil, 1966). One especially useful translation with commentary is Anthony Wilden's translation of the essay published as The Language of Self; the function of language in psychoanalysis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968). Lacan's seminars offer much easier reading than the essays in Ecrits, and in some senses they offer a more authentic vision of what Lacan was about. Norton is bringing them out.

One might begin with The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988). For a good evaluation of Lacan, as well as a bibliography, see Malcolm Bowie's Lacan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Derrida has written an incredible number of books, but Of Grammatology (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) remains the touchstone, I think, for what deconstruction is all about, as do the essays in Writing and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). I will reverse my stance here, however, and recommend that the beginner consult secondary material before digging into deconstruction.

Christopher Norris's Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London: Methuen, 1982) will greatly facilitate entrance into the labyrinth of deconstruction, as found in the above-mentioned works by Derrida.

Other essential writings are found in the essays Derrida has published in Margins of Philosophy (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1982) and in Dissemination (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). For a l 1 j i l Bibliographic Essay 171 more advanced introduction, one might consult Barbara Johnson's The Critical Difference (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1980) or Rodolphe Gasche's The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

Finally, I will list a few writers whose books I have found useful, for various reasons, in years of reflecting on Jiterary theory. Gerard Genette's works have usually been of great help, especially some of the later works such as Fiction and Diction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). Tzvetan Todorov is another reliable guide, and I recommend, among other books, his Introduction to Poetics (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1981). Umberto Eco is a witty and erudite writer whose various works are often illuminating, though his A Theory of Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) is probably as much an illustration of the impossibility of semiotics as a program for its realization. The essays edited by Thomas M. Kavanagh in The Limits of Theory (Stanford: The Stanford University Press, 1989) offer some different perspectives on theoretical questions by major French thinkers.

Jay Clayton's The Pleasures of Babel: Contemporary American Literature and Theory (New York: ,Oxford University Press, 1993) can bring one up to date on the importance of theory in America and has a good bibliography. Another report on the role of theory in America (with a bibliography on its demise) is found in David Simpson's The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half-Knowledge (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

To conclude, let me point to an initial source of inspiration for much that has gone into this book: the writings of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. His subtle investigations into what he calls "language games" are one of the richest sources for understanding and for criticizing the uses of language that theoreticians make. The basic book in this regard is Philosophical Investigations (New York: Macmillan, 1958). For an introduction to Wittgenstein and literature, see my Words in Reflection (listed above). One need not agree with Wittgenstein to recognize in him one of the most important thinkers about language in our century.